

## Durham E-Theses

---

### *For and Against Narrative: The Hermeneutics of the Parable in Early Christian Gospels*

BREWER, TODD,HAMILTON

#### How to cite:

---

BREWER, TODD,HAMILTON (2015) *For and Against Narrative: The Hermeneutics of the Parable in Early Christian Gospels*, Durham theses, Durham University. Available at Durham E-Theses Online:  
<http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/11061/>

#### Use policy

---

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced, and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- a full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- a [link](#) is made to the metadata record in Durham E-Theses
- the full-text is not changed in any way

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

Please consult the [full Durham E-Theses policy](#) for further details.

---

Academic Support Office, Durham University, University Office, Old Elvet, Durham DH1 3HP  
e-mail: [e-theses.admin@dur.ac.uk](mailto:e-theses.admin@dur.ac.uk) Tel: +44 0191 334 6107  
<http://etheses.dur.ac.uk>

**For and Against Narrative**  
**The Hermeneutics of the Parable in Early Christian Gospels**

By

Todd Brewer

Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

at the

University of Durham  
Department of Theology and Religion

2015

## Abstract

This thesis examines the narrative and non-narrative interpretive approaches to Jesus' parables employed in early Christian Gospels (Thomas, Matthew, Mark, and Luke) in order to understand some of the inherent tendencies of these hermeneutical approaches. Chapter One outlines the narrative and non-narrative interpretations, what I call 'mural' and 'data' approaches, with special reference to the works of Hans Frei and Rudolf Bultmann as their modern representatives. In his form criticism and hermeneutical approach, Bultmann aptly represents a 'data' approach to the Jesus tradition, analogous to the Gospel of Thomas. Conversely, Hans Frei represents the 'mural' approaches of the narrative gospels by understanding the narrative unfolding of Jesus' life to be constitutive of his identity.

Through an investigation of Thomas' compositional history, Chapter Two justifies a comparison between Thomas and Mt/Mk/Lk by placing Thomas next to these texts as a fourth synoptic witness. As a textual tradition in constant motion, Thomas cannot be located outside of the synoptic tradition as either an *early*, pristine testimony to a non-narrative Jesus tradition, or a *late* deviation from a prior narrative trajectory. Consequently, the employment of either a 'mural' or 'data' approach by these early Christian Gospels is a hermeneutical choice reflecting these texts' interpretive aims.

Chapter Three investigates the understanding of history espoused by the 'mural' and 'data' approaches through a comparison of Matthew, Thomas, and Luke's interpretations of the parable of the lost sheep. Existing along a common spectrum in their understandings of the relationship between the past of Jesus' ministry and its present-day significance, Luke's *biographical* hermeneutic exclusively articulates the parable's past meaning without reference to the present, Thomas' *de-historicizing* hermeneutic sacrifices the past in favor of the present, while Matthew resides between the two, narrating the past of Jesus' ministry in an *exemplary* fashion with an eye toward its present-day significance.

Chapter Four takes up the issue of Christology entailed by the 'data' and 'mural' approaches to the parable of the tenants. In their renderings of the parable, it is the narrative contexts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke which enable vivid Christological readings as the narrative of the parable interfaces with the narrative world of Jesus' ministry. Without such an anchoring in a narrative of Jesus' life, Thomas' 'data' interpretation fails to assume Christological significance and reflects a wider indifference to Jesus' particular personhood.

In these ways, narrative preserves Jesus' history, thereby providing a more fertile ground for Christological reflection, while a non-narrative approach intrinsically expresses little interest in either Jesus' history or his identity.

### **Statement of Copyright**

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation of it should be published in any format, including electronic, without the author's prior written consent. All information derived from this thesis must be acknowledged appropriately.

## Declaration

This work has been submitted to the University of Durham in accordance with the regulations for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It is my own work, and no part of it has been previously submitted to the University of Durham or in any other university for a degree.

## Contents

Abstract.....	i
Statement of Copyright.....	ii
Declaration .....	iii
Contents.....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	vi
Abbreviations.....	vii

### Chapter One - For and Against Narrative: the ‘Mural’ and ‘Data’ Approaches to the Jesus

<b>Tradition .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1. Rudolf Bultmann, the <i>Analyst</i> of the Jesus Tradition .....	6
1.1. <i>History of the Synoptic Tradition</i> : Digging for the Gospel of Thomas .....	8
1.2. Jesus, the Word.....	12
2. Hans Frei and the Recovery of Narrative Interpretation.....	15
3. Recent ‘Data’ and ‘Mural’ Approaches to the Parables.....	20
3.1. Parables in Search of a (Contextual) Meaning.....	21
3.2. Narrative Frames for Parabolic Art.....	24
4. Conclusion .....	26

### Chapter Two - Thomas, a Fourth Synoptic Witness..... 28

1. A ‘Family Tree’ Model and Current Positions on Thomas’ Composition .....	32
1.1. An Early, Independent Thomas.....	34
1.2. A ‘Rolling Corpus’ Compositional Model.....	34
1.3. A Late, Dependent Thomas.....	36
1.4. Which Thomas? .....	38
1.5. Methodological Considerations.....	39
2. A More Orthodox Thomas (Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 654) .....	40
2.1. Finding, Marveling, (Being Disturbed), Resting, and Reigning (Saying 2) .....	41
2.2. The Evolution of the Oneness Motif (Saying 4).....	44
2.3. For and Against a General Resurrection (Saying 5) .....	47
3. Stable, Migrant, and Rewritten Sayings (Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 1) .....	50
3.1. A Sign of Stability (Saying 26) .....	51
3.2. Forced Migration (Saying 30) .....	54
4. A Significant Difference and a Dependent Saying (Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 655) .....	59
4.1. <i>Why Should One Not Worry?</i> (Saying 36).....	60
4.2. A Test Case of Dependence upon Mt/Lk (Saying 39) .....	63
5. Beyond Oxyrhynchus: the Genre and Title of Thomas Through Time.....	67
5.1. The One, Worthy Apostle (Saying 13) .....	69
6. Conclusion .....	73

### Chapter Three - Mediating the Past of Jesus’ Parables: the Parable of the Lost Sheep in

<b>Matthew, Thomas, and Luke.....</b>	<b>75</b>
1. The Father’s Care for ‘Little Ones’ - Matthew 18.12-14.....	77
1.1. General Features of the Matthean Parable.....	77
1.2. The Perilous Fate of ‘Little Ones’: The Immediate Setting of the Matthean Parable .....	78
1.3. The Parable of the Lost Disciple .....	79
1.3.1. Seeking Out the Lost Brother.....	82
1.4. Community Discipline within the Gospel Narrative .....	84
1.5. Summary.....	86
2. Jesus’ Journey Toward the Reader - Thomas Saying 107.....	87

2.1. General Features of the Thomasine Parable .....	87
2.1.1. The Sayings Collection Context of Thomas' Parables .....	87
2.2. The Immediate Interpretive Context of the Thomasine Parable .....	88
2.3. Christology or Anthropology? .....	89
2.4. The Same (Contemporary) Ends, But Different Means – Matthew and Thomas....	94
3. The Parable of the Lost Tax Collectors-Sinners - Luke 15.3-7 .....	96
3.1. General Features of the Lucan Parable .....	96
3.2. Grumbling Houseguests: The Immediate Setting of the Lukan Parable.....	97
3.3. Jesus' Defense of his Dinner Companions .....	98
3.4. Jesus' Ministry of Eating .....	103
3.5. The Parable of the Lost Sheep in Acts? .....	106
4. Luke, Matthew, and Thomas - Three Methods of Mediation .....	107
4.1. Bultmann and Frei's Hermeneutics of History .....	110
 <b>Chapter Four - The Christological Possibilities of Parables: The Parable of the Tenants in Thomas, Mark, Matthew, and Luke .....</b>	 <b>114</b>
1. The Murderous, Unworthy Tenants: Thomas Saying 65 .....	114
1.1. General Features of the Thomasine Parable .....	114
1.2. 'I Tell my Mysteries to Those who are Worthy of my Mysteries': The Immediate Context of the Thomasine Parable .....	115
1.3. The Good Man and the Unworthy, Wicked Tenants .....	118
1.4. The Worldly Hall of Shame in Sayings 63-65 .....	121
1.5. The Rejected Teaching/Cornerstone.....	122
2. The Rejection of the Son of God: Mark 12.1-11.....	125
2.1. General Features of the Markan Parable .....	125
2.2. 'By What Authority?': The Immediate Setting of the Markan Parable .....	126
2.3. One God and One Vineyard: Mark's Reading of Isaiah.....	127
2.4. The Rejection of the Beloved Son of God.....	130
2.5. The Not-so Secret Divine Christology .....	132
2.6. Thomas and Mark.....	137
3. The Christological Parable of the Tenants, Version 2.0 .....	138
3.1. General Features of the Matthean Parable.....	138
3.2. Jesus' Rejected Authority: The Immediate Setting of the Matthean Parable .....	139
3.3. The Parable of the Tenants: From Judaism to Christianity? .....	140
3.4. From Israel to the Church.....	145
3.5. Matthew and Mark.....	146
4. Luke's Parable and the Fate of Jerusalem.....	146
4.1. General Features of the Lukan Parable.....	147
4.2. Jesus' Parable to the People: The Immediate Setting of the Lukan Parable.....	148
4.3. The Visitation of the Rejected Cornerstone .....	150
4.4. Jesus' Prophetic Ministry of Repentance and Judgment .....	152
5. The Christological Possibilities of 'Data' and 'Mural' Approaches .....	155
5.1. The Christ of Narrative and the Jesus of Sayings .....	158
 <b>Conclusion - Assessing the Value of 'Data' and 'Mural' Approaches .....</b>	 <b>164</b>
1. Summary .....	164
2. Implications .....	171
 Bibliography .....	 179



## Acknowledgements

I am very appreciative of the manifold support I have received while writing this thesis. In particular, I am grateful for the guidance and feedback given to me by my advisor, Francis Watson. He has been exceedingly generous both with his time and attentiveness to my project as well as the encouragement he has given me to think more deeply about theological and hermeneutical issues. Many thanks are additionally due to my examiners, Prof. Mike Higton and Dr. Simon Gathercole, whose thorough and insightful comments on my thesis have strengthened its argument. I am also deeply thankful for the financial support I have received for this project from Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry and the Diocese of Pittsburgh, especially Bishops Price and McConnell. I have also greatly benefitted from the teaching of the New Testament faculty here at Durham University, in particular John Barclay, Lutz Doering, and William Telford. Special thanks should especially go to my many discussion partners while at Durham: Vernon Alexander, Andy Byers, Matt Crawford, Ben Despain, Robbie Griggs, Jeanette Hagen, Wes Hill, Rev. Peter Kashouris, Jono Linebaugh, Orrey McFarland, Adam Powell, Jon Parker, and Nate Warne. I also wish to express my indebtedness to Paul Zahl, for the many things I have learned from him and for his encouraging me to pursue PhD studies in the first place. Finally, I owe a great debt of gratitude to my parents, Greg and Laura Lee, for their continual guidance, and to my wife, Kelly, for her unfailing love and support.

2N OY2MOT M&T€

Todd Brewer  
Good Friday, 2015

## Abbreviations

All abbreviations of ancient literature, academic journals and monograph series follow the forms indicated in the *SBL Handbook of Style: For Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Early Christian Studies* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006).

## Chapter One - For and Against Narrative: the ‘Mural’ and ‘Data’ Approaches to the Jesus Tradition

In the aftermath of Jesus’ life, the traditions of teachings and actions ascribed to him enjoyed immediate and significant popularity for many circles of the early Christian movement. For these communities, the Jesus tradition proved to be incredibly versatile, utilized within various cultural contexts and for numerous purposes. As new situations arose within Christianity, the teachings and events of Jesus continued to have abounding significance as a source for continuing reflection. The life and teachings of Jesus endured wherever and whenever Christianity was and is to be found. But this proliferating Jesus tradition did not itself prescribe any particular hermeneutical approach to interpreting its subject matter, leading to an inevitable hermeneutical uncertainty within the early church. What Jesus said or did was interpreted in a variety of ways as the church sought to understand Jesus and his present-day significance.

For many, the plethora of Jesus traditions available was viewed as discrete sayings of abiding importance. What mattered most was that Jesus said a given teaching and Jesus’ words were understood in their own right apart from a narrower embedding within a chronological story of his life. This is what I call a ‘data’ approach to the Jesus tradition.<sup>1</sup> Within its popular and scientific usage, data is viewed as a type of truth that is autonomous or self-contained. The production of data is the goal or result of experimentation and once it is discovered it becomes an interpretive object in its own right: data is analyzed, scrutinized, or examined. A ‘data’ approach to the gospels seeks to mine the Jesus tradition to generate the raw data of Jesus’ teaching that then can be understood in its own light, without the contextualization of narrative. This is not necessarily a de-contextualized methodology, as data points may be correlated together to create a trend, just as two teachings can be understood in light of each other.

The other approach of early Christianity to interpreting the Jesus tradition understood the narrative unfolding of his life to be fundamental to proper understanding. Here, the

---

<sup>1</sup> The characterization of this interpretive approach as a ‘data’ approach is indebted to, though slightly distinct from, Jacobus Liebenberg’s description of recent parables research, “The preceding discussion attempted to focus on the ever-increasing role that the teaching of Jesus and more specifically the parables and aphorisms, as “database” with distinct “historical value” which supersedes that of their narrative frameworks (and which only require their “correct, original” *form* and *Sitz im Leben* in order to provide access to Jesus) played in the question of their historical Jesus as the century progressed’. Jacobus Liebenberg, *The Language of the Kingdom and Jesus: Parable, Aphorism, and Metaphor in the Sayings Material Common to the Synoptic Tradition and the Gospel of Thomas* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2001), 46.

teachings and events comprise a larger irreducible story of Jesus' life, within which the constitutive parts are to be understood. These narratives do not provide data to be mined and isolated from the whole; instead, the individual events depend upon their contextual setting within a narrative framework for their meaning. This is what I call a '*mural*' approach to the Jesus tradition. Murals, by virtue of their usually large painting surface, often visually depict several events together toward a central theme. The events of a mural often move chronologically to create a narrative structure.<sup>2</sup> Like narrative, teachings or actions of murals are rendered as scenes. To understand a mural one must follow the progressive movement of the painting, noting the repeated motifs that hold the work together. In distinction to the 'data' approach, a 'mural' hermeneutic sees the story of Jesus as the narrative framework within which Jesus' actions and teachings must be understood.

These two approaches, 'data' and 'mural', are represented within early Christianity by the Gospels of Thomas and Matthew/Mark/Luke/John, respectively. The former contains a series of 114 teachings of Jesus with little to no depictions of his life. Occasionally, a teaching is introduced through a small conversation between Jesus and another figure (disciples, Salome, etc.), but these are sparse with detail and occur infrequently in the text. Each saying is usually introduced by the repeated phrase 'Jesus said/says' (ⲡⲉⲗⲉ ⲓⲉⲛ in the Coptic text and λέγει Ἰησοῦς in the Greek fragments). The loose, and often disconnected, list of Jesus' teachings offer the 'data' desired by the interpreter. In this way, the genre of Thomas as a sayings collection is reflective of his 'data' interpretive approach. Conversely, the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all interweave the events and teachings of Jesus within continuous stories, narrating his life as it proceeds in linear time within various settings. Each evangelist depicts a coherent 'mural' of Jesus' life from beginning to end, with each scene building upon and recalling each other. By way of a comparison between the interpretation of Jesus' parables in the Gospel of Thomas and the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the present study seeks to determine some of the inherent interpretive tendencies of the 'data' and 'mural' approaches.

As the Jesus tradition spread through the history of Christianity, the hermeneutical uncertainty of the tradition persisted into the patristic era. Despite the increasing acceptance of the narrative gospels, these 'data' and 'mural' approaches to the Jesus tradition continued to be operative and may be typified in the interpretations of the parable of the sower by Clement of

---

<sup>2</sup> For more on the narrative structure of murals, see, M.A. Lavin, *The Place of Narrative: Mural Decoration in Italian Churches, 431-1600* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

Alexandria and John Chrysostom.<sup>3</sup> In his *Stromata* 1.7, Clement offers a ‘data’ oriented approach to the parable of the sower within his lengthy discourse on the relationship between faith and philosophy. Alluding to Matthew 5.45, the knowledge possessed by Greek culture, which includes philosophy, is said to have rained down from God, who indiscriminately distributes this wisdom equally to all. But if the gift of knowledge is given equally to all, then what accounts for the wide differences between cultures? For Clement, the answer to this question is found in the parable of the sower and the prior allusion to Matthew 5.45 has clearly influenced his rendering of the parable. The world receives from Christ, the sower, the divine gift of the word since the foundation of the world. Differences of knowledge exist because of the differences between the places upon which the seed fell. In addition, the sower does not only sow wheat, but a great many other variety of agricultural products that are ‘all useful for life [αἱ πᾶσαι βιωφελεῖς],’<sup>4</sup> corresponding to the various branches of philosophy: Stoic, Platonic, Epicurean, or Aristotelian. In their own way, all of these, for Clement, ‘teach righteousness with godly knowledge [δικαιοσύνην μετὰ εὐσεβοῦς ἐπιστήμης ἐκδιδάσκοντα].’<sup>5</sup> However unfamiliar this may seem to those acquainted with the synoptic gospels’ understanding of the parable, Clement’s own understanding is nevertheless an ingenious reading of the parable. The sower is equated with Jesus and the sowing of the word represents Christ’s gift of righteousness/wisdom to all. Utilizing the parable’s report of a single casting of seed, Clement envisions this to have occurred at a single time before the creation of the world. The parable’s successive description of the soils corresponds loosely with the passage of time and, for Clement, their various geographic locations entail the gift of the divine logos to the world. Clement produces a reading of the parable is plainly a ‘data’ approach. The parable lacks almost all of the distinguishing narrative details offered by the synoptics and instead firmly resides within the theological context offered by Clement. While Jesus is identified as the sower, there is no indication to whom, or where, or why the parable was spoken. The parable is coordinated with the saying from Matthew 5.45, but this also lacks narrative characteristics.

---

<sup>3</sup> The use of these figures in this argument is principally illustrative and anecdotal of the two approaches to the Jesus tradition. *It is not meant to offer a comprehensive account of the development of early Christianity exegetical practices and its various influences, or to suggesting anything comprehensive about Clement or Chrysostom’s exegetical practices.* Reference may have been easily made to other theologians of early Christianity, with the ‘data’ approach reflecting the writings of Origen, Irenaeus, or even Paul in Acts 20.35 and the ‘mural’ approach represented by the writing of Tertullian or Paul in 1 Cor. 11.23-25. It may also be possible to map the ‘data’ and mural’ methods upon Frances Young’s contrast between rhetorical and philosophical schools in her book, Frances M. Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> Clement, *Clementis Alexandrini opera quae Exstant Omnia*, ed. J.P. Migne, Patrologiae Graecae (Paris: 1857), *Stromata* 1.7.6.

<sup>5</sup> Clement, *Clementis Alexandrini opera quae Exstant Omnia*, *Stromata* 1.7.6.

So while it is possible that Clement had the Matthean text in view, it is especially notable that no mention is made of where the teaching originates.<sup>6</sup> What matters to Clement is simply that Jesus taught the parable and he interprets it without reference to any narrative features.

Turning to Chrysostom, his discussion of the parable of the sower follows a broader discussion on Matthew 12.46-49,<sup>7</sup> connecting its themes to the surrounding narrative contexts at several points. He notes the scene provided in Matthew's mural; Jesus sat in a boat by the sea, facing the people not without purpose but in order to be heard by all. Jesus speaks here in parables and Chrysostom contrasts this indirect form of speech with his more direct address on the mount. He deduces that the audience of the parable is comprised of both the 'simple people [δῆμος ἄπλastos]' and the more learned Scribes and Pharisees. Finally, Chrysostom observes that the order of the collection of parables is not random, but begins with the most vivid parable 'which makes the hearer more attentive [τὴν ποιοῦσαν τὸν ἀκροατὴν προσεκτικώτερον]'. Having set the stage, he then continues with his interpretation of the parable. For Chrysostom, the sower is Jesus and his coming to the field represents Christ's 'clothing himself with flesh [τῆς κατὰ σάρκα περιβολῆς]'. Jesus sows the word of godliness, his doctrine, to the souls of men. The indiscriminate nature of the sower's casting then depicts Christ's indifference to the worldly distinctions of men, whether rich/poor, wise/unwise, slothful/diligent, or brave/cowardly. The failure of the seed to take root follows that of Matthew's interpretation, those who carelessly receive the word, the rich, and the superficial. Nevertheless, Chrysostom highlights that this reckless dispensing of the word is characteristic of God's love to all people. If they do not receive the word with repentance, then the fault lies with them, 'not because of their nature, but because of their decision [οὐ παρὰ τὴν φύσιν, ἀλλὰ παρὰ τὴν γνώμην]'. The parable, for Chrysostom, thus spurs the hearer toward moderation away from the vices and excesses of the world. In this way, Chrysostom has little time for either the seed that falls on the path or the rocky soil and has reduced the admonition of the parable to the threat of thorns and the cares of the world. Yet this application of the parable to Chrysostom's hearers is nevertheless a reading of the parable and not straightforwardly imposed upon the text. Instead, the temporal distance between Jesus' first

---

<sup>6</sup> Clement's citation of non-canonical material raises the question of the gospel texts he reads, but here it seems as though the version of the parable of the sower he uses also includes an interpretation of it, remarking that the parable was interpreted by the Lord (ἦν ὁ κύριος ἡρμήνευσεν). This indicates Clement's usage of Matthew, and it also further underscores his 'data' interpretation of a narrative text, since his interpretation so widely diverges from that of Matthew.

<sup>7</sup> Found in homily 44 of John Chrysostom, *Homiliae In Matthaeum*, ed. J.P. Migne, vol. LVII, *Patrologia Graeca* (Paris: 1839).

telling of the parable and his present day is maintained and acknowledged. Chrysostom turns to speak in the first person plural ‘we’ only after the statement, ‘therefore hearing these things [Ταῦτ’ οὖν ἀκούοντες]’, which marks the end of his exegetical analysis and the beginning of the text’s present-day implications. Chrysostom maintains the integrity of the mural of the narrative without painting himself into it.

This comparison between Clement of Alexandria and Chrysostom illustrates briefly the methodological strategies employed by both the ‘data’ and ‘mural’ approaches to interpreting Jesus’ parable of the sower and, by extension, Jesus’ teachings in general. In the ‘data’ approach, the teaching of Jesus is treated as a discrete entity whose meaning is self-contained. It may be coordinated with other teachings, but this connection is supplied by the interpreter as best fitting the teaching. By comparison, the ‘mural’ approach understands the teaching to be embedded within a wider setting providing contextual details such as the addressees of Jesus’ teaching, its geographical location, its place within a wider discourse, its effect, and its placement within the wider ministry of Jesus. They are not extraneous to understanding the teaching, but integral to this endeavor. Those things which the ‘mural’ approach sees as essential are the very aspects of the Jesus tradition the ‘data’ approach eschews. These two stances toward the Jesus tradition are therefore not compatible or complementary, but are opposed to each other in their evaluation of the necessary components of the Jesus tradition and its relation to the teaching. They may arrive at similar understandings of particular teachings of Jesus’ life, but they do so either by coincidence or through the residual force of the narrative of the gospels upon the ‘data’ approach.

It is not necessarily the question of whether Chrysostom’s interpretation of the parable, by virtue of its narrative interpretation, is more ‘correct’ than Clement’s, or whether Clement’s interpretation is preferred. Both Clement and Chrysostom have offered compelling readings of Jesus’ parable of the sower and have sought to understand its significance. The question is instead what difference it makes whether one seeks to interpret the parable of the sower *qua* parable or the parable within the wider nexus of a narrative. How might one’s hermeneutical approach direct or influence one’s reading? Or more precisely, what relationship is there between the method one employs, ‘data’ or ‘mural’, and the resultant interpretation? It is not simply that Clement and Chrysostom approach the parable with divergent theological or contextual presuppositions, though that is certainly the case. But perhaps their chosen means of reading the parable have, themselves, certain inherent *tendencies*.

## 1. Rudolf Bultmann, the *Analyst* of the Jesus Tradition

The divide between ‘data’ and ‘mural’ approaches to the Jesus tradition is by no means *only* an ancient issue and it can be traced throughout much of Christian history right up to the present day. Within the twentieth century, the ‘data’ approach to the Jesus tradition and the gospels finds its perfection with the advent of form criticism and the writings of Rudolf Bultmann, while the ‘mural’ approach is championed in the work of Hans Frei. Though they have many predecessors upon whose shoulders they stand,<sup>8</sup> these two figures are important for this study because both have profoundly affected modern interpretation of the Jesus tradition and therefore will be the focus of future chapters.

For Bultmann, the isolation of Jesus’ teachings from the husk of the narrative reaches a methodological precision probably unprecedented in Christian history. Elevating the ‘data’ approach to a science, Bultmann’s *History of the Synoptic Tradition* cuts away with surgical precision almost all the narrative flourishes of the synoptic gospels, thereby arriving at the earliest stratum of the Jesus tradition. If earlier interpreters like Clement expressed indifference to the narrative framework, for Bultmann the narratives of the gospels represented the gradual accrual of traditions and teachings which manifestly did not originate with Jesus and were fabricated by the church. The task of interpretation must then bravely venture to separate the wheat of Jesus’ authentic teachings from the chaff of inauthentic accretions. Despite this difference of motivations between Bultmann and Clement, the association of Bultmann with a ‘data’ approach to the Jesus tradition remains apt and is one of which Bultmann himself was aware. In his popular level summary of form critical methodology he understands form criticism to be a continuation of the goals of pre-modern harmonization projects under a new historical awareness of gospel traditions.<sup>9</sup> As such, Bultmann dissects the Jesus tradition as a continuation of the ‘data’ approach exemplified by Clement. In this approach, Bultmann

---

<sup>8</sup> Bultmann notes in the *History of the Synoptic Tradition* his indebtedness to Julius Wellhausen’s *Einleitung in die drei ersten Evangelien*, Hermann Gunkel, and Martin Dibelius’s *Die Formgeschichte des Evangeliums* in particular, while Hans Frei depends upon the later work of Barth, specifically *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, and Richard Niebuhr’s *Christ and Culture*, specifically the section ‘Toward a Definition of Christ’. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. G. T. Thomson and H. Knight, vol. IV/1 (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010); Martin Dibelius, *Die Formgeschichte des Evangeliums* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1919); H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (London: Faber and Faber, 1952); Julius Wellhausen, *Einleitung in die drei ersten Evangelien* (Berlin: Druck und Verlag von Georg Reimer, 1905). For Frei’s influences prior to *Identity of Jesus* see, Mike Higton, *Christ, Providence, and History: Hans W. Frei’s Public Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 65-67.

<sup>9</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Die Erforschung der synoptischen Evangelien* (Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1966), 7; Rudolf Bultmann and Karl Kundsinn, *Form Criticism*, trans. Frederick C. Grant (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1962 (1934)), 11.



bequeathed to the modern scholarly world a radicalized ‘data’ approach to the Jesus tradition in the service of rediscovering the original historical Jesus before his adulteration in the hands of the community.

The selection of Bultmann as an interpreter of the Jesus tradition may appear odd to some since he is often caricatured as believing he cannot say anything about the historical Jesus. This categorization of Bultmann chiefly arises for two related reasons. The first regularly seizes upon Bultmann’s declaration, ‘Indeed, I am of the opinion that we can know nothing more of the life and personality of Jesus’<sup>10</sup> and misconstrues it as an absolute summary of Bultmann’s historical skepticism without recognizing its contextual and circumscribed meaning.<sup>11</sup> But in the phrase, ‘life and personality of Jesus’, Bultmann, following Schweitzer, refers exclusively to Jesus’ ‘personality and the development of his inner life’, topics which ‘the early Christian sources show no interest in’.<sup>12</sup> Whether or not Bultmann is correct in this judgment, it is far from the sweeping historical skepticism attributed to him. The second reason follows from the first. Once he is popularly understood according to his supposed historical skepticism, Bultmann then falls neatly into the now commonplace three-fold division of historical Jesus studies into various ‘quests’ (first, second/new, and third quests of the historical Jesus).<sup>13</sup> Between the first and second quests, Bultmann is slotted into the ‘no quest’ historical period after Albert Schweitzer and before Ernst Käsemann.<sup>14</sup> This, however, depends primarily upon the above caricature and confuses the second/new quest’s critique of Bultmann’s theological position concerning the relation between Christian faith and history

---

<sup>10</sup> ‘Denn freilich bin ich der Meinung, daß wir vom Leben und von der Persönlichkeit Jesu so gut wie nichts mehr wissen können’. Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus, Die Unsterblichen. Die geistigen Heroen der Menschheit in ihrem Leben und Wirken* (Berlin: Deutsche Bibliothek Berlin, 1926), 12. Cf. Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word*, trans. Louise Pettibone Smith and Erminie Huntress Lantero (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), 8.

<sup>11</sup> Along these lines, Neill and Wright mischaracterize Bultmann’s position, summarizing it as a ‘negative attitude’ that believes, ‘of Jesus of Nazareth, as he actually was in history, we know hardly anything at all’. See also Dawes, who writes in his survey of historical Jesus studies, ‘On historical grounds alone, Bultmann is skeptical about our ability to know the Jesus of history’. Dawes then proceeds to cite the aforementioned quote from Bultmann. Gregory W. Dawes, *The Historical Jesus Question: The Challenge of History to Religious Authority* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 273; Stephen Neill and N.T. Wright, *The Interpretation of the New Testament: 1861-1986* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 265.

<sup>12</sup> ‘Da die christlichen Quellen sich dafür nicht interessiert haben’. Bultmann, *Jesus*, 12. Cf. Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word*, 8.

<sup>13</sup> This tripartite division of historical Jesus studies originates from Neill and Wright, *The Interpretation of the New Testament: 1861-1986*, 379-403.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, the text book on the historical Jesus by Theissen and Merz, which places Bultmann within this ‘no quest’ period. Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 5-7.

with his historical reconstruction.<sup>15</sup> Yet Bultmann cannot be said to occupy a position of ‘no quest’ within a history of Jesus studies chiefly because he published his own book on Jesus in 1926.<sup>16</sup> If Bultmann genuinely did think that there is nothing one can say about Jesus, then writing a book about him is an odd way to show it. Instead, the thorough historical-critical sifting of the Jesus tradition in Bultmann’s form criticism principally operates in service of his own portrait of Jesus. The skepticism of *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (1921) prepares the way for his later *Jesus* (1926) book and it is the congruous relationship between these two works which confirms the association of Bultmann with a ‘data’ approach.

### 1.1. *History of the Synoptic Tradition*: Digging for the Gospel of Thomas

In distinction from Martin Dibelius, the form criticism of Bultmann aims to identify the various additions and modifications of the Jesus tradition by the community in order to identify the earliest stratum of authentic tradition that *may* have originated from Jesus himself. This sifting out of inauthentic, later additions to judge the genuineness of a saying or event Bultmann believes is ‘an essential part [eine wesentliche Rolle]’<sup>17</sup> of his inquiry. To accomplish this task, Bultmann sets out to identify the manner in which the specific forms of the gospel tradition (logia, miracle stories, parables, etc.) were shaped within the life setting (*Sitz im Leben*) of the early church. This requires, on the one hand, a definite picture of the life of the community prior to the composition of the gospel texts, and, on the other hand, an understanding of how the particular forms evolved within this life setting. This procedure is undoubtedly circular, given the absence of information about the communities of the gospels prior to their composition. The starting point for determining the development of particular

---

<sup>15</sup> The issue of the new quest is not that Bultmann refrained from speaking of the historical Jesus, but that his significance for Christian faith was exclusively correlated to his death, rather than the content of his proclamation. Against this position, his student Käsemann vigorously argued that the Jesus’ teachings positively contributed to the content of the kerygma so that the evangelical message of the early church repeats and is informed by Jesus the evangelist. Käsemann states, ‘We can now put our problem in a nutshell: does the New Testament kerygma count the historical Jesus among the criteria of its own validity? We have to answer this question roundly in the affirmative’. Yet it is not that Käsemann offers a historical reconstruction of Jesus’ life that is significantly different from that of Bultmann; the difference instead lies in the assessment of their value *vis-à-vis* Christian faith, a valuation Käsemann interestingly finds justification for in the narrative form of the canonical gospels. Ernst Käsemann, ‘Blind Alleys in the ‘Jesus of History’ Controversy,’ in *New Testament Questions of Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 48.

<sup>16</sup> This is especially true since the book was met with wide commercial success, with several print runs totaling in the tens of thousands by the time Käsemann reinitiated the supposed quest in 1953. Cf. Walter Schmithals, ‘Jesus verkündigt das Evangelium: Bultmanns Jesus-Buch,’ in *Jesus im 21. Jahrhundert: Bultmanns Jesusbuch und die heutige Jesusforschung*, ed. Ulrich H.J. Körtner (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2006).

<sup>17</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition*, 2 ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1931), 6; Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. John Marsh (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 5.

forms thus begins with the modifications made to the tradition between Mark and his successors, Matthew and Luke, as well as between Matthew/Luke and the hypothetical Q document. Having established several principles of transmission, Bultmann retrojects these processes backwards in time to the earliest possible layer of tradition that likely originates from Jesus himself. The resultant picture of the history of the synoptic tradition envisions its movement from Jesus to the Jewish, Palestinian Church, to Hellenistic Christianity.<sup>18</sup> This procedure is certainly remarkable in its rigor, consistently carried out by Bultmann to the entirety of the Jesus tradition.

However impressive this methodological machinery may be, at nearly every point in the Jesus tradition the end result is largely the same: beneath all the narrative flourishes of the gospels lies an identifiable, primitive stratum of Jesus' teachings, intelligible in isolation from that later adulteration. The sorting and study of the Jesus tradition into the variety of forms—the very starting point of form criticism—presumes that the teaching may be isolated from its narrative embedding. The consistent and thoroughgoing nature of this endeavor is particularly evident with Bultmann's treatment of the form he categorizes as an apophthegm. In contrast to the dominical sayings that, 'are not placed within a particular framework', apophthegms are briefly defined as 'sayings of Jesus set in a brief context'.<sup>19</sup> These are scenes within the narrative where a teaching of Jesus is occasioned, conditioned, or generated by an external impetus, such as a question from an interlocutor or a healing. Within the narrative, the scene and the teaching it contains mutually interpret one another. For Bultmann, the cohesion between teaching and scene varies: some appear to be unitary compositions while others are only artificially connected. It is at this point that the distaste for narrative features is revealed. The observation that two conjoined pieces of tradition do not easily cohere is fairly straightforward, but there is nothing in this observation to suggest that one element is more primitive than the other. This, however, is precisely what Bultmann infers:

Instances such as Mk. 2.15-17, 7.1-23, 10.2-12, where the artificiality of the composition is clear as day; or Mk. 2.1-12; Lk. 7.41-43, where the insertion into an alien narrative is clear; or Mt. 12.11f. and Lk. 14.5, where sayings that are placed differently in the tradition, all these show that in many cases the arguments were already there before the narratives themselves.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> A history of the early church Bultmann derives originally from: Wilhelm Bousset, *Kyrios Christos: A History of the Belief in Christ from the Beginnings of Christianity to Irenaeus* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2013).

<sup>19</sup> Bultmann, *Geschichte* 8-9; Bultmann, *History* 11.

<sup>20</sup> 'Fälle wie Mt. 2,15-17; 7,1-23; 10,2-12; wo die Künstlichkeit der Komposition am Tage liegt, wie Mk. 2,1-12; Lk. 7,41-43, wo die Einschaltung in eine fremde Geschichte deutlich ist, wie Mt. 12,11f. und Lk 14,5,

Bultmann deduces here a tendency (*Tendenz*) within apothegms whereby ‘the sayings have commonly generated the situation, not vice-versa’.<sup>21</sup> Though the original apophthegm form contained minimal description of the scene,<sup>22</sup> the narrativization of the original dominical sayings continues for Bultmann along a common trajectory to add greater embellishments that fill out the narrative picture: ‘As soon as the apophthegm is affected by an interest in history or developed story telling we meet with more precise statements’.<sup>23</sup> Originally anonymous locations and persons are then identified and given proper names. Thus, the apophthegm form evolves toward the narratives of the synoptic gospels through the steady ‘intrusion of novel-like tendencies’.<sup>24</sup> So an entire form which depends upon narrative features for its intelligibility is systematically stripped of secondary adornments and only the original dominical saying remains.

The historical process of the tradition from sayings to narrative which Bultmann describes in the apophthegm form becomes paradigmatic for the entirety of the *History of the Synoptic Tradition*. Having reduced the apophthegms to dominical sayings, the dominical sayings (whether they be logia, prophetic and apocalyptic sayings, legal sayings, ‘I’ sayings, or similitudes) can likewise be examined according to their discrete meaning, without reference to the particular narrative frameworks in which they occur. The tradition of dominical sayings has been enlarged and further developed through adaptation to Christian instruction. Individual sayings have been given introductions as well as expansions. This interpretive activity belongs to the pre-history of the synoptic gospels as well as the gospels themselves. When turning to the similitudes, Bultmann recognizes that the interpretation of these sayings depends upon their contextualization, but this ‘as such does not belong to the parable itself’<sup>25</sup> and the secondary character of this narrative contextualization is readily apparent.<sup>26</sup> But with all of the dominical sayings, it is not until the composition of a gospel that these sayings were

---

Sprüche, die in der Tradition verschieden untergebracht sind, - zeigen, daß in vielen Fällen die Argument vor den Geschichten da waren’. Bultmann, *Geschichte* 48-49. Bultmann, *History* 47.

<sup>21</sup> ‘Die Worten eine Situation erzeugt, nicht umgekehrt’. Bultmann, *Geschichte* 49. Cf. Bultmann, *History* 47. It does not seem to occur to Bultmann that the scenes that comprise these disjointed apophthegms might themselves be primitive as well as the teaching within them. Perhaps a good punch-line was needed for a traditional scene?

<sup>22</sup> Bultmann, *Geschichte* 67-68; Bultmann, *History* 63-64.

<sup>23</sup> ‘Sobald das geschichtliche Interesse oder entwickelteres Erzähler interesse sich an die Apophthegmata heranmacht, werden bestimmtere Angaben gemacht’. Bultmann, *Geschichte* 71; Bultmann, *History* 67.

<sup>24</sup> ‘Eindringen novellistischer Tendenzen’. Bultmann, *Geschichte* 72.

<sup>25</sup> ‘Die als solche noch nicht zu dem Gleichnis gehört’. Bultmann, *Geschichte* 208. Cf. Bultmann, *History* 192.

<sup>26</sup> At which point Bultmann concludes that ‘in many parables, the original meaning has become unrecognizable in the course of the tradition [bei vielen Gleichnissen ist im Lauf der Tradition der ursprüngliche Sinn unerkennbar geworden]’. Bultmann, *Geschichte* 216. Cf. Bultmann, *History* 199.

given a fixed time and place within the story of Jesus, where some sayings were attached to given apophthegm settings or new situations were created altogether.<sup>27</sup> Finally, the narrative material of the gospels follows the same pattern of development found in the apophthegms toward greater specificity. However, their authenticity is highly dubious to Bultmann: the miracle stories are an ‘intrusion [Eindringen]’ into the synoptic tradition through the Palestinian or Hellenistic atmosphere [Atmosphäre].<sup>28</sup> The remaining narrative material is legendary in character, and has likewise been thoroughly shaped by and/or derived from the beliefs of the community. Bultmann acknowledges that historical events may underlie the healings and the legendary events, but the narrative form of these events is entirely the product of the tradition.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, the passion straightforwardly reflects a primitive narrative, but this is deeply buried underneath the tradition’s legendary tendencies.<sup>30</sup> This analysis of the narrative traditions is largely negative and they are of little value beyond the acknowledgement of their possible occurrences. In this endeavor Bultmann has effectively neutered the narrative content of the canonical gospels to bare facts of dubious historical authenticity.

The end result of Bultmann’s form criticism is a primitive tradition comprised of almost no narrative features whatsoever. Narrative stories of Jesus grew out of the fragments of historical events: details concerning the time, place, or audience of Jesus’ teachings accrued over time. Instead, the ‘primitive stage’ of the Jesus tradition is comprised of a series of dominical sayings without reference to their original context.<sup>31</sup> For Bultmann, these collections of Jesus’ teachings, in either written or oral form, were the seeds from which the synoptic tradition grew. Within the synoptic corpus, he finds justification for this primitive stage in the loose serializing of teaching, loosely connected by conjunctions γάρ, δέ, or the simple phrase καὶ ἔλεγεν. To justify this primitive dominical tradition, Bultmann cites the text he knows as Pap.Oxy.1, which contains a serialized list of Jesus’ teaching beginning with λέγει ὁ Ἰησοῦς. He believes this longer formula was likely shortened by the evangelists to fit the appropriate contexts. In other words, Bultmann hypothesizes that the most primitive stage of the synoptic tradition is none other than a sayings collection like the Gospel of Thomas. Bultmann, of

---

<sup>27</sup> Bultmann, *Geschichte* 355-56; Bultmann, *History* 329.

<sup>28</sup> Bultmann, *Geschichte* 253.

<sup>29</sup> ‘Auch wenn einigen Heilungswundern historische Vorgänge zugrunde liegen, so ist doch ihre Formung die Arbeit der Tradition gewesen’. Bultmann, *Geschichte* 244. Cf. Bultmann, *History* 228.

<sup>30</sup> ‘So I suppose that there was a primitive report, which told very briefly of the arrest, condemnation by the Sanhedrin and Pilate, transfer to the cross, crucifixion and death. [Ich vermute also, daß es einen altern Bericht gab, der ganz kurz Verhaftung, Verurteilung durch das Synedrium und Pilatus, Abführung zum Kreuz, Kreuzigung und Tod erzählte]’. Bultmann, *Geschichte* 301-02. Cf. Bultmann, *History* 279.

<sup>31</sup> Bultmann, *Geschichte* 348; Bultmann, *History* 322.

course, does not claim that the text of Thomas itself underlies the synoptic tradition: the Coptic text had not yet been discovered. Nevertheless, he approvingly cites the basic sayings collection form of P.Oxy.1, the Greek fragment later correlated with Thomas' Sayings 26-33. It is not overstating the case to say that the discovery of the Gospel of Thomas is the crowning moment of Bultmann's form criticism, validating its presuppositions and conclusions. It is the long sought-after text which Bultmann would have enthusiastically received. The net result of form criticism is the creation of an early Jesus tradition whose literary form and interpretive approach resembles the Gospel of Thomas.

## 1.2. Jesus, the Word

For the purposes of this study the question is not necessarily whether Bultmann was *historically* correct in his suppositions either about the transmission process of tradition or the depiction of the history of the early Christian communities. On these fronts, Bultmann's form criticism has been so commonly critiqued that many of its assumptions are largely viewed today as passé<sup>32</sup>—even as many of his operating assumptions as a 'data' interpreter persist among his most vigorous modern day detractors.<sup>33</sup> The issue instead lies in how Bultmann's historical approach is informed by and informs his interpretation of the Jesus tradition, for the historical results of his form criticism not-so-inadvertently correspond to his hermeneutic of history.

---

<sup>32</sup> "Today, form criticism is being challenged on several—if not all—of its basic tenets. Scholars have abandoned it or modified it". Samuel Byrskog, 'Introduction,' in *Jesus in Memory: Traditions in Oral and Scribal Perspectives*, ed. Werner H. Kelber and Samuel Byrskog (Baylor: Baylor University Press, 2009), 19. Cf. Sanders and Davies, 'When we study in detail the form critical "laws" of the development and change of the material, we discover that none of them holds good. A comparison of the quotations of Jesus' sayings in second- and third-century literature with the synoptic versions does not reveal that the sayings tended to become longer and more detailed, or shorter and less detailed. Individual tellers might expand or abbreviate, might elaborate or epitomize. There are no general laws about length and detail'. E. P. Sanders and Margaret Davies, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1989), 128. Instead, research has shifted to the dynamics of oral tradition, early eyewitnesses of Jesus and the role of individual/social memory. See, for example: Dale C. Allison, *Constructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination, and History* (London: SPCK, 2010); Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006); Samuel Byrskog, *Story as History - History as Story*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000); James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered: Christianity in the Making* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); Birger Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity* (Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1961); Anthony Le Donne, *The Historiographical Jesus: Memory, Typology, and the Son of David* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2009). For a good summary of recent criticism on Bultmann/Bousset's reconstruction of Palestinian/Hellenistic Christianity see: L. W. Hurtado, 'Fashions, Fallacies and Future Prospects in New Testament Studies,' *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 36, no. 4 (2014).

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Neill and Wright, 'To attempt to get behind traditions in their present form to the situation in which they were first formed and to which they seemed immediately relevant is a perfectly legitimate exercise of the critical art'. Neill and Wright, *The Interpretation of the New Testament: 1861-1986*, 264. This is true not only within historical Jesus studies like the Jesus Seminar or the 3<sup>rd</sup> quest of the historical Jesus, but also within modern-day homiletical practices, which often harvest the narrative for its isolated sayings.

According to Bultmann's existential hermeneutic of history, the true significance of history is realized when the interpreter, moved by the questions of his pre-understanding, interrogates history and its claim upon the present.<sup>34</sup> If the significance of history lies in the new possibilities of the interpreter's self-understanding, this entails the rejection of what Bultmann calls the psychological approach to history, in which the historian seeks to understand a historical phenomenon according to his/her inner development. He claims: 'Whoever is of the belief that it is only through history that one may be informed about the possibilities of his own existence, will necessarily reject the psychological approach—however right that method is in its own sphere—if one is concerned with genuinely understanding history'.<sup>35</sup> Such an approach to history has a limited validity because it cannot impart to the interpreter this true understanding of history. Likewise, Bultmann has no interest in a portrait of Jesus either as a great genius/hero or in accordance with his personality or self-understanding. These questions are 'irrelevant [nebensächlich]'<sup>36</sup> because they only present Jesus as an event in time, with no present-day significance. Consequently, Bultmann excludes from his inquiry any interest in Jesus' self-understanding or personality and almost all biographical details about Jesus are omitted from his historical presentation. His focus is instead upon 'what he willed, and therefore what his historical existence may demand in the present'.<sup>37</sup> For Bultmann, Jesus is primarily a preacher, so if his purpose is to be comprehended one must exclusively look to his teaching. Why Jesus must be so closely identified with his preaching is not elaborated and the arbitrariness of this decision betrays Bultmann's presuppositions. Consequently, Bultmann's *Jesus* book ignores most of the details featured in the narrative form and he proceeds to arrange Jesus' teachings topically, seeking to understand the individual sayings in light of the shape of the whole. The effect of this decision on the understanding of Jesus' teaching, and the parables in particular, will be the subject of future chapters. For now, it is significant to note that Jesus' teaching assumes a privileged place in *both* Bultmann's hermeneutic of history and his historical inquiry into the synoptic tradition. So while he conceives of his *Jesus* book and *History of the Synoptic Tradition* to be separate

---

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Rudolf Bultmann, 'Das Problem der Hermeneutik,' *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 47 (1950).

<sup>35</sup> 'Wer des Glaubens ist, über die Möglichkeiten seiner Existenz erst durch die Geschichte Aufschluß zu erhalten, wird deshalb die psychologische Betrachtungsweise, so berechtigt sie an ihrem Platze sein mag, ablehnen, wenn es sich darum handelt, die Geschichte wirklich zu verstehen'. Bultmann, *Jesus*, 10. Cf. Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word*, 6.

<sup>36</sup> Bultmann, *Jesus*, 13. Cf. Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word*, 9.

<sup>37</sup> 'Was er gewollt hat und was deshalb als Forderung seiner geschichtlichen Existenz Gegenwart werden kann'. Bultmann, *Jesus*, 11-12. Cf. Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word*, 8.

endeavors, with the former being an existential encounter with ‘the complex of ideas which is present in that oldest layer of the synoptic tradition’,<sup>38</sup> the two enterprises both elevate Jesus’ teaching over against the biographical information of the individual narratives. Traveling down the seemingly separate paths of history and hermeneutics, Bultmann happily arrives at the same destination. This can hardly be a coincidence. Bultmann himself is aware that his hermeneutic appears to ‘make a virtue of necessity [aus der Not eine Tugend machen]’,<sup>39</sup> but it does not occur to him that they may be related. Instead, both his historical and hermeneutical enterprises seem to be informed by a common theological presupposition. It was Luther who exclusively attributes Christ’s significance to his word: ‘If I had to do without one or the other—either the works or the preaching of Christ—I would rather do without the works than without his preaching. For the works do not help me, but his words give life, as he himself says [John 6:63]’.<sup>40</sup> So behind his rigorous and complex methodologies for historical and hermeneutical study of the gospels lies a theological preference for Jesus’ words. As a ‘data’ interpreter of the Jesus tradition, Bultmann is simply being a good Lutheran. This theological preference does not itself invalidate Bultmann’s ‘data’ hermeneutic, as if to expose some hidden fault, rather it underscores that his approach to the Jesus tradition congruously operates in accordance with his theological aims.

In the operating assumptions of his hermeneutical approach to the gospel texts, Bultmann shows himself to be a ‘data’ interpreter of the Jesus tradition and in this way his similarity to the Gospel of Thomas is clear.<sup>41</sup> Like Thomas, Bultmann seeks to understand only Jesus’ teachings. As in Thomas, the narrative features of Jesus’ life are of little importance for understanding either Jesus or his teachings. Instead, the sayings of Jesus are only understood on their own and in relation to the whole collection. If Bultmann represents the modern-day perfection of the ‘data’ approach to the Jesus tradition, the Gospel of Thomas is his ancient

---

<sup>38</sup> ‘Der Komplex von Gedanken, der in jener ältesten Schicht der Überlieferung vorliegt’. Bultmann, *Jesus*, 17. Cf. Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word*, 14.

<sup>39</sup> Bultmann, *Jesus*, 12; Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word*, 8.

<sup>40</sup> Martin Luther, ‘Preface to the New Testament [1552, Revised 1546],’ in *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 6, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955-76), 443-44.

<sup>41</sup> The correlation between Bultmann and the Gospel of Thomas as embodiments of a ‘data’ approach to the Jesus tradition is verified by the preference for Thomas by Bultmann’s form critical followers, as noted by Schröter, ‘This tendency [to orient a historical presentation of the person of Jesus exclusively or primarily to his sayings]—which can be detected since the time of Bultmann’s *Jesus* book and has led in parts of present day research to a one-sided prioritization of Q and the *Gospel of Thomas* for the historical question’. Jens Schröter, *From Jesus to the New Testament: Early Christian Theology and the Origin of the New Testament Canon*, ed. Wayne Coppins and Simon Gathercole, trans. Wayne Coppins, BMSEC (Waco/Tübingen: Baylor University Press/Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 116.



counterpart. The inherent tendencies of Bultmann's preference for a 'data' approach are not addressed by Bultmann and will be the subject of future chapters.

## 2. Hans Frei and the Recovery of Narrative Interpretation

Within the current field of hermeneutics, if Bultmann perfected the 'data' hermeneutics into a science, Hans Frei is responsible for the recovery of the 'mural' approach. Writing in the mid-1970s, Frei's research into narrative is very much a response to the immense popularity enjoyed by Bultmann in the 1950s and 60s. Frei's disagreements with Bultmann are manifold, but at the root of them all lay a belief that Bultmann's hermeneutical and theological enterprise has obscured or disfigured the narrative form of the gospels. Rather than seeking some truth found outside of the narratives of the gospels Frei placed the narrative form at the foundation of his study of the narrative gospels. The simplicity of this formulation reveals something of its circularity and its ingeniousness. That a narrative should be read accordingly seems to be an obvious claim on the surface, but within the scholarly world of his day it was a revolutionary idea that sparked a renewed interest in the significance of the Gospels' narrative form.

As an embodiment of a 'mural' hermeneutic, Frei's narrative approach contains the fundamental insight that the meaning of a narrative occurs when 'characters or individual persons, in their internal depth or subjectivity as well as in their capacity as doers and sufferers of actions or events are firmly and significantly set in the context of the external environment, natural but more particularly social'.<sup>42</sup> A narrative is comprised of a series of interactions within a complex setting of persons, places, and things. Characters and social setting belong together, interdependent upon each other. Within the gospels, the two sides of interaction between Jesus and his setting constitute two aspects of his identity. Jesus is who he is through his agency and that of others.<sup>43</sup> The former paradigm is termed by Frei as Jesus' intention-action, whereby Jesus' identity is revealed by what he does and this action simultaneously reflects his intention to perform an action. His identity does not reside solely within his intention: this would alienate his identity from the narrative sequence into an unknowable reality beyond the text. Nor must Jesus' enactment be bound to intention, lest Jesus cease to be

---

<sup>42</sup> Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974), 13.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Frei, 'his identity is given in the mysterious coincidence of his intentional action with circumstances partly initiated by him, partly devolving upon him'. Hans Frei, *The Identity of Jesus: the Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology*, Updated and Expanded ed. (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2013), 101-02.

a ‘centered self’.<sup>44</sup> The second side of interaction outlined by Frei concerns the agency of others and their relation to Jesus.<sup>45</sup> These are, ‘the enactment of others’ intentions and even of unintended events as well as those not specifically intended. Things happen *to* a person that enter into the very identification of him’.<sup>46</sup> For Frei, these events are demonstrations of Jesus’ powerlessness and obedience to the Father, who almost providentially directs the course of events leading to Jesus’ death.<sup>47</sup> So a ‘mural’ hermeneutic does not only recognize Jesus’ actions as constitutive for the narrative’s meaning, but must also account for the varieties of activities of others and their relation to Jesus. This larger setting is not only fitting for a narrative portrayal of Jesus; they also configure meaning in a significant manner. Jesus lived a particular life at a particular time interacting with particular people and places. These circumstances are not incidental to who he is, but shape his un-substitutable identity. By holding together event and personhood, Frei outlines a fruitful paradigm for a ‘mural’ hermeneutic. In distinction from the prioritization of Jesus’ teaching found in Bultmann’s ‘data’ approach, Frei places the events that comprise the Gospel narratives at the heart of their interpretation. The teachings of Jesus cannot be understood in isolation from either his activity or his social setting. Moreover, these events of the narrative occur through the placement of this interactivity within chronological sequence, offering a ‘cumulative account of the theme’.<sup>48</sup> The narrative has an emergent meaning, whereby the successive events of the narrative dynamically coalesce into an integral whole. The meaning of a given part is not autonomous, but known through its relation to the whole and vice-versa.

But beyond Frei’s significant observation of how the integral aspects of narrative comprise a narrative interpretation, in many ways Frei’s project may too narrowly define its

---

<sup>44</sup> Frei, *The Identity of Jesus*, 101.

<sup>45</sup> By focusing on the agency of others as the counterpart to Jesus’ own agency, I have simplified Frei’s own presentation of what he calls ‘self-manifestation’ description, defined as ‘the continuity of a person’s identity throughout the transitions brought about by his acts and life’s events’. This somewhat confusingly includes a varied of other themes, such as Jesus’ words, his body, and the various stories of salvation about him. The agency of others upon Jesus is just one of these themes, but I have chosen to focus on this for the sake of conceptual clarity and its natural contrast to Jesus’ agency. Frei, *The Identity of Jesus*, 130. For more on Frei’s ‘self manifestation’ description see: Higton, *Christ, Providence, and History: Hans W. Frei’s Public Theology*, 103-07.

<sup>46</sup> Frei, *The Identity of Jesus*, 101.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Frei, for whom Jesus’ ‘accusers and judges’ and the ‘vast mass of humanity’ all, ‘constitute a wide span of what may be called “historical forces”’. The phrase points to the forces of world history that the gospel writers discern as acting powerfully upon Jesus at the moment of his powerlessness. Now, there is in the New Testament, of course, a sharp distinction between these “forces” and the ultimate, divine origin from which all action derives. God and the world (or God and daemonic powers) are never confused in either the Old or New Testaments. Still, there is a mysterious and fascinating coincidence or “mergence” between divine action and the “historical forces” at their common point of impact—Jesus’ judgment and death’. Frei, *The Identity of Jesus*, 120.

<sup>48</sup> Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, 13.

parameters, particularly in what it denies. For Frei, a narrative hermeneutic necessitates that one view the dynamics of the ‘narrative shape’ to be equated with ‘the meaning, theme, or subject matter of the story’.<sup>49</sup> This implies more than the simple observation that the narratives must be viewed as a coherent whole. Instead, it requires that the meaning of the narrative is essentially *the same* as the narrative form. Frei constructs a contrast between narrative meaning-as-reference and narrative meaning-in-itself, the latter being Frei’s preferred interpretive approach. The core issue of this contrast pertains to the *location* of the narrative’s meaning. This dichotomy certainly has many parallels to the comparison between ‘data’ and ‘mural’ interpretive approaches, but they are not entirely identical. The difference between the two may be found, in part, within the subtle shift between Frei’s description of pre-modern hermeneutics where ‘meaning and narrative bear significantly on each other’<sup>50</sup> to Frei’s own position, where ‘narrative meaning *is identical* with the dynamics of its descriptive shape’.<sup>51</sup> Perhaps in seeking to recover a pre-modern narrative understanding from its modernist adulterations, Frei has swung the pendulum too far. What was initially a question of value or significance is instead, for Frei, an issue of ontology. It is one thing to strongly correlate meaning and narrative shape, but it is altogether different to equate, or confine, meaning to this narrative shape. This imbalance is later corrected by Frei in his Shaffer and Cabury lectures of 1983 and 1987, respectively. In these, Frei follows Barth to suggest that reading a text realistically or literally may enable one to describe a text’s extratextual reality, but in an *ad hoc* and unsystematic fashion.<sup>52</sup>

For the present study, the issue is not the location of a narrative’s meaning, but the very means of arriving at meaning within the broader field of the Jesus tradition, either for or against narrative. So it could prove to be the case that the genuinely narrative hermeneutic employed by the gospels may allow for a broader theory of meaning than the ‘early’ Frei would admit. For example, if the meaning of a narrative is not to be found outside of its realistic depiction, then the narrative is not a means to an end to discover an extra-textual historical reality, as in the case of both historical criticism (as with Bultmann above) and apologetics. These do not recognize or appreciate ‘the narrative shape in its own right’ but elevate ‘the question of the factuality of biblical reports’ as ‘the important thing about the

---

<sup>49</sup> Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, 13.

<sup>50</sup> Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, 11.

<sup>51</sup> Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, 312.

<sup>52</sup> Hans Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, ed. George Hunsinger and William C. Placher (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 84-85.

Bible'.<sup>53</sup> Such a historical interest may have strong affinities with a 'data' approach, extracting the particularity of narrative events from their coherent context and placing them into a foreign context behind the narrative,<sup>54</sup> yet it remains possible that this identification may be encouraged by the narrative itself in ways that the 'early' Frei does not allow.<sup>55</sup> The same is true of the 'early' Frei if one wishes to push beyond the irreducible narrative world to that of the author, salvation history, or beyond to the present as seen with Chrysostom. The meaning of narrative cannot be distinguished from that of the author,<sup>56</sup> nor can it be incorporated into a larger salvation-historical enterprise<sup>57</sup> or toward its communal function.<sup>58</sup> These configurations of meaning likewise impinge upon the unity of the narrative toward some 'other', yet it is again an open question whether the particular narratives of the gospels themselves sanction such an interpretive venture. *Nevertheless*, by seeking to understand the canonical gospels in accordance with their narrative form Frei shows himself to aptly represent what I call a 'mural' approach to the Jesus tradition and offers a paradigm for how it can proceed. That Frei's narrative hermeneutic strongly coheres with the approach of the gospels of Mt/Mk/Lk is an obvious consequence of his stated goals. By placing the narrative form at the heart of his interpretive framework, Frei mirrors the gospels' own utilization of narrative for the transmission and interpretation of the Jesus tradition.

---

<sup>53</sup> Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, 150.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. 'The real history of the biblical narratives in which the historian is interested is not what is narrated or the fruit of its narrative shape; rather, it is that to which the story refers or the conditions that substitute for such a reference. In short, he is interested not in the text as such but in some reconstructive context to which the text "really" refers and renders it intelligible'. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, 134-35.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Lee, speaking on the Lukan prologue, 'What the *substance* of these passages of "historical extravagance" contributes is a separate discussion which will depend upon the complex relationship between text and historical reconstruction. However, the function of these passages is significant. It seems that the passages endeavor to relate the world of the narrative to a specific extra-textual historical time and place. Whether the Lukan narrator is historically accurate or not, there is no equally satisfactory alternative literary explanation for the *function* of the extravagance of this type of material. In Frei's theoretical discussion of his sociolinguistic scheme he fails to address this aspect of the Gospel text'. He continues, 'more work needs to be done to elucidate the relationship between possible historical claims of the texts and a theological reading of the Gospels'. David Lee, *Luke's Stories of Jesus: Theological Reading of Gospel Narrative and the Legacy of Hans Frei* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 93-94, 94-95.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. 'Especially in narrative, novelistic, or history-like form, where meaning is most nearly inseparable from words—from the descriptive shape of the story as a pattern of enactment, there is neither need for nor use in looking for meaning in a more profound stratum underneath the structure (a separate "subject matter") or in a separable author's "intention," or in a combination of such behind-the-scenes projections'. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, 281.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, 179-82. Though in many ways Frei's reticence on this point is justified inasmuch as salvation-historical readings of gospel texts tend toward a 'data' approach, mining the seamless narrative for the data they contribute to the larger story.

<sup>58</sup> It should be noted that in later years Frei's thought shifted away from his earlier, narrower definition of narrative meaning. The later Frei, recognizing the social nature of knowledge and language, envisioned a positive role for the continued use of the narrative by the Christian community's rule of faith. This shift will be addressed in Chapter Four. For more on Frei's later shift toward an ecclesial orientation, see Higton, *Christ, Providence, and History: Hans W. Frei's Public Theology*, 177-213.

Lost amid Frei's lengthy discussion of narrative is the obvious question: why *must* narrative be so essential? Frei rigorously defends the narrative form as the most suitable manner for interpreting the narrative gospels, but does he have wider theological aims than this simple hermeneutical concern? If his concern is hermeneutical, then the normativity of Frei's approach depends exclusively upon a high doctrine of scripture, one that fails to offer any direct critique of the theological concerns of Bultmann's 'data' hermeneutic. It is certainly the case that Frei's *Eclipse of the Biblical Narrative* outlines the failure of suitable readings of narrative texts, but when he applies this approach to the synoptic gospels Frei's broader theological concerns arise. Frei does not simply examine the narrative form of the narrative gospels because this makes him a better exegete of these texts. Instead, he finds the shape of the narrative form to be the most appropriate means to communicate the saving act of Jesus. As Davis suggests, 'Attentive readers should guard against allowing the tail of Frei's hermeneutical approach to Jesus' identity to wag the dog of his christological convictions'.<sup>59</sup> This becomes clear through his criticisms of the attempts to view modern literary figures as 'Christ figures'. For Frei, these are illustrative counter examples of individuals who offer a pattern of saving activity similar to that of Jesus. The 'Christ figure' of Billy Budd<sup>60</sup> is inadequate because, 'The saving individual and the saving pattern of this story are different from the gospel story. Indeed, the pattern is so different that the universal outreach is put in grave doubt'.<sup>61</sup> Frei believes that the gospel story of the narrative gospels succeeds where Billy Budd fails because the pattern of life it contains ensures the efficacy of the salvation it offers. A critique of this kind necessarily implies that the narratives of the gospels sufficiently describe Jesus' universal saving action. The unity of Jesus' presence and identity 'lies solely in the savior's own singular, unsubstitutable, and self-focused being'<sup>62</sup>—the very characteristics of the gospel narratives. In other words, Frei employs a narrative hermeneutic because it is the narrative form which reveals Jesus' salvific identity. For Frei, a 'data' approach to the Jesus tradition cannot save because it is the narrative form of Jesus' life that communicates the actualization of a universal salvation. Therefore, as with Bultmann above, Frei's preference for narrative coincides with his theological beliefs and a 'mural' hermeneutic appropriately communicates the salvific character of the narrative events of Jesus' life.

---

<sup>59</sup> Joshua B. Davis, 'Introduction,' in *The Identity of Jesus Christ: The Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2013), xxiii-xxiv.

<sup>60</sup> Frei does not suggest that Melville has written Billy to be a Christ-figure explicitly, only that the story may be, and has been, viewed as such.

<sup>61</sup> Frei, *The Identity of Jesus*, 82.

<sup>62</sup> Frei, *The Identity of Jesus*, 73.

In their demonstrable affinities with the ‘data’ and ‘mural’ approaches to the Jesus tradition, Bultmann and Frei are the modern counterparts to the authors of Gospel of Thomas and the synoptic gospels. In both his form criticism and hermeneutic of history, Rudolf Bultmann expresses a theological preference for Jesus’ teachings, to the near total exclusion of narrative elements. In doing so, Bultmann constructs a theoretical text that is comparable to the Gospel of Thomas in form and content. As interpreters of the Jesus tradition, Thomas and Bultmann are the epitome of a ‘data’ hermeneutic. Conversely, Hans Frei considers the narrative form eschewed by Bultmann and Thomas to be the hermeneutical key to proper understanding of Jesus. If the interpretive approach of Bultmann and Frei strongly correlates with their wider theological aims, then it may be the case that these hermeneutical stances are not necessarily value neutral. Rather, the approach of the interpreter toward their material entails several presuppositions about either the subject matter or the goal of interpretation. Accordingly, it may be possible through a study of these interpretive approaches to discern some of their inherent tendencies.

### 3. Recent ‘Data’ and ‘Mural’ Approaches to the Parables

Bultmann and Frei are by no means alone in their affinities with the ‘data’ and ‘mural’ hermeneutics and, as with Clement and Chrysostom, recent parables scholarship can likewise be categorized in one of the two camps. But because of the ubiquitous interest in the historical Jesus question, modern scholarship has overwhelmingly favored a ‘data’ hermeneutic to understanding Jesus’ parables and several interpreters have perfected this approach in surprisingly divergent ways. What follows is not, by any means, an exhaustive survey, but outlines many of the key contributors to the modern debate on parable interpretation. The principal divide between the ‘data’ and ‘mural’ approaches to Jesus’ parables concerns the negative or positive evaluation of the narrative context in which Jesus’ parables are placed by the gospels of Mt/Mk/Lk. Having judged these settings to be inadequate historically, the question then becomes how they were originally employed by the historical Jesus. The center of this debate surrounds the rhetorical function of a parable, and therefore whether the canonical interpretations of parables are historically accurate. But despite the overwhelming trend of modern scholarship against the evangelists’ contextualization of Jesus’ parables, a number of more recent scholars insist that these renderings are essential to understanding the meaning of parables.

### 3.1. Parables in Search of a (Contextual) Meaning

The father of modern parables scholarship, Adolf Jülicher contended that parables serve an illustrative function, and are told ‘to illuminate that one point: a law, an idea, an experience, which is true on the spiritual as on the earthly life’.<sup>63</sup> A parable is a simile in narrative form and therefore cannot be an allegory. Jülicher employs this literary insight toward historical ends, suggesting that the parables Jesus told only contained a single point and they were not employed by him in an allegorical manner. Given the allegorizing tendencies of the evangelists, the historical reliability of their narrative contextualization is, for Jülicher, largely overturned. For Jülicher, ‘If the Master is not identical to the evangelists, and he gives us more than the evangelists, then we must all turn only to him, to understand him better than the evangelists’.<sup>64</sup> This historical judgment against narrative leads Jülicher to a ‘data’ approach to Jesus’ parables followed by Bultmann (as seen above) and many subsequent interpreters.

If the evangelists’ settings for the parables are historically unreliable, C.H. Dodd<sup>65</sup> and Joachim Jeremias<sup>66</sup> sought to recover their original setting within the life of Jesus, the prophet of the kingdom. While Dodd and Jeremias are not as thoroughgoing as Bultmann is in their eshewing of the evangelists’ setting for the parables, the result is nevertheless a ‘data’ rendering of the parables, utilizing the data of canonical narratives to recover the original form and setting of the parables as it was originally heard by the first hearers. This contextualization of the parables within history may be said to be a type of a ‘mural’ hermeneutic, inasmuch as this re-contextualized history has the character of narrative, but this similarity is also misleading. In practice, the trading of ‘narrative’ for ‘history’ inevitably leads to a ‘data’ treatment of the canonical narrative. Here, the narrative realism of the ‘mural’ approach is in principle discarded, following Jülicher, and then artificially reconstructed through the parables’ historical-critical re-contextualization within Jesus’ preaching of the kingdom. Apparently complex parables are simplified to a more basic account and the specific applications of parables within the narratives are discarded, resulting in an original form of the parable that

---

<sup>63</sup> ‘Jenen einen Punkt, ein Gesetz, eine Idee, eine Erfahrung, die im geistlichen wie im irdischen Leben gilt, zu beleuchten’. Adolf Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu: zwei Teile in einem Band* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1969), 1: 317.

<sup>64</sup> ‘Ist der Meister nicht identisch mit den Evangelisten, und giebt er uns mehr als die Evangelisten, so müssen wir alles eben daran wenden, ihn besser als die Evangelisten zu verstehen’. Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, 1: 11.

<sup>65</sup> C. H. Dodd, *Parables of the Kingdom* (London: Nisbet & Co. Ltd., 1935).

<sup>66</sup> Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, trans. S. H. Hooke, Second Revised ed. (London: SCM Press, 1972).

mirrors the Gospel of Thomas.<sup>67</sup> Seeking to obtain the original form and life situation of the parable, the indissoluble link between form and setting is broken as Dodd and Jeremias freely move from the evangelists toward the historical Jesus. This link between parable and context is re-formed by Dodd and Jeremias, though it occurs through their preconception of the shape of the ministry of the historical Jesus and it is this picture that controls their interpretations. If Clement's apologetic/theological context frames his interpretation of the parable of the sower, it is the meta-context of Jesus' ministry of the kingdom of God that frames Dodd and Jeremias' approaches.<sup>68</sup> However different their motivations may be, the enterprises of Dodd and Jeremias are formally similar to the 'data' approach of Clement.<sup>69</sup>

The historical approach modeled by Dodd and Jeremias in particular has been followed by numerous subsequent interpreters of the parables,<sup>70</sup> seeking to re-contextualize the parable within the life of the historical Jesus through a 'data' study of the available witness. Further research into parables by Ernst Fuchs<sup>71</sup> and his student, Eberhard Jüngel,<sup>72</sup> sought to understand the function of the parabolic form beyond its merely referential, metaphorical, use. Bringing together the form and content of the parables, they are 'speech events' of the historical Jesus that do not merely illustrate the kingdom of God, but themselves actualize its presence.<sup>73</sup> The renewed focus on the function of the parabolic form generated new possibilities for parable studies. Particularly for John Dominic Crossan<sup>74</sup> and Norman Perrin,<sup>75</sup>

---

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Jeremias, who notes the recent discovery of the Gospel of Thomas and remarks, 'The fact that this has confirmed the results of our analysis to a surprising degree proves it [the analysis of parables] has been conducted on the right lines'. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 114.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Dodd, 'I shall try to show that not only the parables which are explicitly referred to the Kingdom of God, but many others, do in fact bear upon this idea, and that a study of them throws important light upon its meaning'. Dodd, *Parables of the Kingdom*, 33. Cf. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 230.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Gerhardsson, 'In the footsteps of Form Criticism, one takes the narrative bodies of the parables out of their settings and liberates them from the controlling non-narrative elements they are connected to in the gospels. In that way it is possible to analyse them differently and use them for new purposes. The naked narratives may then be put into new contexts and perspectives; thus fresh possibilities of interpretation are released. The old texts become as if they were new'. Birger Gerhardsson, 'If We Do Not Cut the Parables Out of Their Frames,' *New Testament Studies* 37, no. 3 (1991), 322.

<sup>70</sup> This is especially true in the works of Günther Bornkamm and Eta Linnemann. See, Günther Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. Irene McLuskey, Fraser McLuskey, and James M. Robinson (London: Hodder and Stoughton Limited, 1960); Eta Linnemann, *Gleichnisse Jesu: Einführung und Auslegung*, Third ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1964).

<sup>71</sup> Ernst Fuchs, *Studies of the Historical Jesus*, trans. Andrew Scobie, Studies in Biblical Theology (Naperville: Alec R. Allenson, Inc., 1964).

<sup>72</sup> Eberhard Jüngel, *Paulus und Jesus: eine Untersuchung zur Präzisierung der Frage nach dem Ursprung der Christologie* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004).

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Jüngel, 'Die Gleichnisse Jesu sind Sprachereignisse, in denen das, was in ihnen zur Sprache gekommen ist, *ganz* da ist, indem es als Gleichnis da ist. [The parables of Jesus are speech-events, in which what has come in them by speech is *entirely* there while it is there as a parable]'. Jüngel, *Paulus und Jesus*, 138.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Crossan, the parables are 'metaphors in which information precedes participation so that the function of metaphor is to illustrate information about the metaphor's referent; there are also metaphors in which



since the parables not only illustrated a given theme, but also enable the hearer to participate in the parable's story, then the issue of a parable's *specific* context is far less important. Instead of contextualizing a parable within a narrative-like scene, the parables were interpreted within a wider ideological framework. But while Perrin sought to understand the parables in light of eschatology, following Dodd and Jeremias, for Crossan Jesus' parables are contextualized and interpreted as teachings of wisdom.<sup>76</sup> Likewise, Bernard Brandon Scott entirely departed from Dodd and Jeremias' quest to discover the original *Sitz im Leben* of the parables, and instead contextualized them within first-century Judaism and Jesus' broader teaching about the kingdom of God.<sup>77</sup> Crossan's non-eschatological portrait of Jesus and the endeavor to critically reconstruct the original form of the parables would both prove to be influential within parable studies, especially by Robert Funk.<sup>78</sup> Along similar lines, Werner Herzog<sup>79</sup> followed Crossan and contextualized the parables within the socio-economic tyranny of first-century peasant life. The focus on the parabolic form also raised the question of the mysterious and polyvalent nature of parables and the works of Charles Hedrick and Mary Ann Tolbert,<sup>80</sup> for whom the creative power of the story demands its own metaphorical meaning apart from its contextualization.<sup>81</sup> As polyvalent stories, for Hedrick and Zimmerman the burden of understanding a parable is placed on the modern-day reader.<sup>82</sup> Still others, such as Klaus Westermann<sup>83</sup> and Brad Young,<sup>84</sup> have understood the parables according to Jesus' Jewish

---

participation precedes information so that the function of metaphor is to create participation in the metaphor's referent'. J. D. Crossan, *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 14.

<sup>75</sup> For whom the parables, 'mediate experience of the reality being proclaimed. But at the same time there were parables which functioned as paraenesis, parables concerned to develop the theme of response, just as there were paranelical proverbial sayings'. Norman Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), 56.

<sup>76</sup> See, for example, his treatment of the parable of the mustard seed, in which the apocalyptic eschatological imagery of the tree and nesting birds is excised. Crossan, *In Parables*, 45-49.

<sup>77</sup> Bernard B. Scott, *Hear Then the Parable: A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989).

<sup>78</sup> Robert. W. Funk, *Funk on Parables: Collected Essays* (Santa Rosa: Polebridge Press, 2006).

<sup>79</sup> William R. Herzog, *Parables as Subversive Speech: Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994).

<sup>80</sup> Charles W. Hedrick, *Many Things in Parables: Jesus and his Modern Critics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004); Mary Ann Tolbert, *Perspectives on the Parables: An Approach to Multiple Interpretations* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979).

<sup>81</sup> See also, James G. Williams, *Gospel Against Parable: Mark's Language of Mystery*, ed. David M. Gunn, vol. 12, BLS (Decatur: Almond, 1985).

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Zimmerman, 'The readers will also read the parables of Jesus from different standpoints, areas of interest and motivations. They also can select from the abundance of socio-historical and tradition-historical information and interpretations'. Ruben Zimmerman, 'How to Understand the Parables of Jesus. A Paradigm Shift in Parable Exegesis,' *Acta Theologica* 29, no. 1 (2009), 176.

<sup>83</sup> Claus Westermann, *The Parables of Jesus: In the Light of the Old Testament*, trans. F.W. Golka and A.H.B. Logan (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990).

context. Though they may proceed in vastly different ways, in the service of history each one of the above 'data' interpreters holds in common a desire to understand Jesus' parables apart from their narrow embedding within a narrative context. Like Dodd and Jeremias above, the historical pursuit of these 'data' interpreters breaks the bond between a parable and its context within a narrative of Jesus' life. And then, with the exception of Hedrick, each one of the above 'data' interpreters re-contextualizes the parable within a new, artificial, context—whether that be a *Sitz im Leben*, or Jesus' preaching of the kingdom of God, or first century Palestine in general.

This widespread search for a context for the parables highlights the indissoluble bond between a parable and its context.<sup>85</sup> If the narrative world of the parable is to assume a symbolic character, it depends upon contextualization if it is to be understood. Without such a contextualization, a parable is simply a fascinating story.<sup>86</sup> Similarly, the diversity of contextualizations and subsequent interpretations of a given parable signals the polyvalent nature of parables and the dependence of a parable upon its context, since its meaning can so widely diverge with even small contextual differences.

### 3.2. Narrative Frames for Parabolic Art

If the search for a historical understanding of Jesus' parables has produced a plethora of 'data' interpreters of the Jesus tradition, 'mural' approaches have only arisen more recently. The path toward a 'mural' approach to the parables in many ways began with the overturning of Jülicher's thesis against allegorical interpretation in the works of Hans-Josef Klauck,<sup>87</sup> Madeline Boucher,<sup>88</sup> and Craig Blomberg.<sup>89</sup> For these writers, since parables can themselves be

---

<sup>84</sup> Brad Young, *The Parables: Jewish Tradition and Christian Interpretation* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1998).

<sup>85</sup> As Klyne Snodgrass notes, 'By taking the parables out of the context of Jesus' prophetic ministry *one places them in another context*, however hidden or unrecognized. They cannot be hung in empty space'. Klyne Snodgrass, 'Stories with Prophetic Intent. The Contextualization of Jesus' Parables,' in *Hermeneutik der Gleichnisse Jesu*, ed. Ruben Zimmerman (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 158.

<sup>86</sup> This point is fascinatingly illustrated in the short story by David Foster Wallace, 'Another Pioneer', where a story is relayed second-hand by an airline passenger who has overheard it being told by a nearby traveler. But by virtue of weather delays, the beginning part of the story was never heard by the narrator. Consequently, 'there was no enframing context or deictic antecedent as such surrounding the archetypal narrative... That it appeared to come, as the fellow described it, out of nowhere'. Without any contextualization, the story (parable?) that follows resists any precise metaphorical or allegorical meaning, despite its obvious similarity to several prominent themes. David Foster Wallace, *Oblivion* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2004), 117-18.

<sup>87</sup> H.J. Klauck, *Allegorie und Allegorese in synoptischen Gleichnistexten* (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 1978).

<sup>88</sup> Madeleine Boucher, *The Mysterious Parable: A Literary Study*, CBQMS (Washington D.C.: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1977).

allegorical parables, then the allegorical interpretations found in the evangelists cannot be discounted out of hand. While they did not necessarily outline a narrative hermeneutic, the recovery of allegory as a valid interpretation vindicates the evangelists' narrative approaches. Moreover, the recognition of the polyvalent nature of parables simultaneously sparked comprehensive studies on the effect of a parable's narrative contextualization. If the polyvalent nature of parables has, for some, pushed the task of interpretation to the activity of the present-day reader, for others, such as Mary Ann Tolbert and Jacobus Liebenberg, the polyvalence of parables underscores the interpretive activity of the narrative evangelists.<sup>90</sup> If parables do not have a single meaning, then the multiplicity of meanings testified by the canonical gospels are legitimated. This coincided with renewed interest in narrative critical studies of the gospels (following Hans Frei) and it was Birger Gerhardsson who suggested that the parables of the canonical gospels must be understood within their narrative framework: 'If, however, we stick to the narrative meshalim as our eyes meet them in the gospels, we must accept the fact that they are not naked stories there, not texts in a pure, exclusively narrative form. They are framed. The little story has a setting; it is part of a pericope'.<sup>91</sup> Gerhardsson brackets the historical question of the evangelists' interpretations of the parables in favor of a 'mural' approach to understanding their meaning. Along these lines, there have been several notable narrative studies of the gospels which have likewise sought to elucidate the meaning of the parables within their narrative contextualization, such as John Drury, J. D. Kingsbury, and Robert Tannehill.<sup>92</sup>

Overall, it is only relatively recently that 'mural' approaches to Jesus' parables have been explored. If a 'data' study of the Jesus tradition has pervaded most of modern parables studies, the 'mural' approach has posited itself as a compatible alternative: one can do historical study in accordance with its underlying 'data' premises, or one can also do narrative analysis. This arrangement is largely unsatisfactory and it is the goal of the present study to compare and contrast these interpretive approaches with one another in order to determine what each approach has to offer in accordance with its inherent interpretive tendencies.

---

<sup>89</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, Second ed. (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2012).

<sup>90</sup> Liebenberg, *The Language of the Kingdom and Jesus*; Mary Ann Tolbert, *Sowing the Word: Mark's World in Literary Historical Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996).

<sup>91</sup> Gerhardsson, 'If We Do Not Cut the Parables Out of Their Frames,' 325.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. John Drury, *The Parables in the Gospels: History and Allegory* (New York: Crossroad, 1985); Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew As Story*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1988); Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, vol. 1: The Gospel according to Luke (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986).

#### 4. Conclusion

The following study intends to investigate the inherent tendencies of the ‘data’ and ‘mural’ approaches to the Jesus tradition by way of a comparison between Thomas and the gospels of Mt/Mk/Lk. Chapter Two will proceed first by justifying the basis of such a comparison through a detailed examination of Thomas’ composition history. In addition to answering the preliminary textual and compositional issues that inevitably arise when interpreting Thomas, this study will place Thomas within a common synoptic plane with the texts of Mt/Mk/Lk. But most importantly, if Thomas is a rough contemporary with Mt/Mk/Lk, indebted to these texts just as Matthew and Luke are indebted to Mark, then their narrative frameworks can be said to be a hermeneutical choice, rather than being the only interpretive genre available to them. Likewise, the selection and preservation of the ‘data’ sayings collection also represents an interpretive choice. Because of the fundamental interrelation between a parable and its context (in either the ‘data’ or ‘mural’ approaches), the selection of the parabolic teaching is most appropriate. A parable needs its surrounding context like a fish needs water to both breathe and swim. By examining what occurs to a parable/context in the hands of different interpreters, the hermeneutical pressure exerted by that contextualization reveals some of its inherent features.

The subsequent chapters seek to understand the inherent features of these ‘data’ or ‘mural’ approaches through a comparison of two parables of Jesus, the parable of the lost sheep and the parable of the tenants. These have been chosen in particular because of the specific issues they raise when compared across the narrative-sayings divide. In this way, these two parables are representative of the tendencies of ‘data’ and ‘mural’ approaches and these tendencies may be extrapolated to other parables common to Thomas and Mt/Mk/Lk. Additionally, these parables have been selected because they are two of only a handful of parables that occur across Thomas and more than one of his synoptic counterparts. Other parables could have been examined, such as the parable of the mustard seed or the parable of the leaven, but space does not permit their inclusion in this study.

Chapter Three compares the interpretations of the parable of the lost sheep within Matthew, Thomas, and Luke, with special reference to these texts’ hermeneutic of history. Each of these interpreters seek to understand the relationship of the past and present in divergent ways: Thomas de-historicizes the parable to address the present, Matthew addresses the present specifically through the past, while Luke avoids the parable’s present-day implications to emphasize its past, historical character. Unlike a ‘data’ approach, a ‘mural’

hermeneutic has an inherent orientation to the past, though the relation between past and present is construed differently in Matthew and Luke.

The final Chapter Four will then examine the parable of the tenants and its occurrence in the gospels of Thomas, Mark, Matthew, and Luke. Through their understandings of the parable of the tenants, the relationship between their hermeneutical approaches and Christological beliefs is revealed. What impact does a narrative or sayings approach have for their rendering of the identity of Jesus? Thomas offers a distinctly non-Christological reading; Mark coordinates the parable with his wider use of Christological titles; for Matthew the parable is the key to salvation-history; while Luke reads the parable as a Christological drama that foretells and instigates the destruction of the Temple. For a mural hermeneutic, the parable in particular demonstrates the ways in which a given teaching may be coordinated within the ‘mural’ of the narrative toward varying ends and it is this coordination which enables and encourages a Christological reading of the parable since the actions of the parable’s protagonist are readily equated with the actions of Jesus provided by the narrative. Conversely, the ‘data’ approach of Thomas reveals how an originally Christological parable may be readily reconfigured toward ethical means within a saying collection.

It is possible at this point to more precisely state the central thesis of this study. The Jesus tradition has been subject to a variety of interpretive approaches that fall on either side of a divide of what I call ‘data’ and ‘mural’ approaches to understanding Jesus, according to one’s valuation of narrative and its relation to Jesus. This decision—either *for* or *against* narrative—entails a number of interpretive and theological tendencies in the fields of historical study and Christology. In recognizing these tendencies, the question arises whether the chosen hermeneutical stance is appropriate for one’s exegetical objectives or if the selection of a ‘data’ or ‘mural’ approach is at odds with the purpose of one’s inquiry. The methodology employed to interpret the Jesus tradition inevitably influences the outcome of that endeavor and this study is devoted to the discovery of these inherent influences and outcomes.

## Chapter Two - Thomas, a Fourth Synoptic Witness

Before comparing the Gospel of Thomas with Matthew, Mark, and Luke (Mt/Mk/Lk) and the 'data' and 'mural' interpretive approaches they employ for their parabolic material, it is first important to justify and ground such a comparison. On what basis can Thomas and Mt/Mk/Lk participate in a joint conversation about the interpretation of parables? More importantly, is this conversation a dialogue between equals, or is there a pre-existing imbalance between conversation partners? This chapter seeks to show that Thomas is not a foreign text to be excluded from the synoptic conversation, but instead is directly comparable with Matthew, Mark, and Luke, belonging with them as a fourth synoptic text. If successful, this will make three distinct contributions toward the overall argument of the thesis. Firstly, it will address many of the introductory issues surrounding a study of the Gospel of Thomas, such as its composition procedure, date of authorship, and relation to the canonical gospels. Secondly, if Thomas belongs with the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke within a common synoptic solar system, then this justifies a comparison between these texts and their interpretive approach. Thirdly, this suggests that both the 'data' and 'mural' interpretive approaches to the Jesus tradition were operative within early Christianity prior to the formal or informal establishment of the fourfold gospel canon. Finally, the establishment of a common synoptic plane suggests that the implementation of either a 'data' or a 'mural' approach reflects an interpretive choice on the part of the author.

Thomas and his synoptic counterparts can and should be read together within a common interpretive horizon if they are to be properly understood. This synoptic status is not a mark of authority and should not be confused with canonical status: instead, the suggestion that Thomas is a synoptic witness with Mt/Mk/Lk recognizes that, on the basis of their similar content and their common interest in a shared Jesus tradition, these should be interpreted alongside each other. In much of current scholarship, however, the relationship between these witnesses is not a complementary synoptic relationship, but one of competitive rivalry. It is not Thomas together *with* Mt/Mk/Lk, but Thomas *against* Mt/Mk/Lk, with Thomas either displacing Mt/Mk/Lk or being excluded from the synoptic discussion altogether. This antagonism between Thomas and Mt/Mk/Lk is largely determined according to Thomas' early or late dating relative to Mt/Mk/Lk. For many, Thomas is a witness to a Jesus wholly

independent of the traditional portrait provided by Mt/Mk/Lk.<sup>1</sup> An early Thomas is vastly superior to the canonical gospels since its interpretations likely preserves their original, and thereby historically authoritative, meanings. The ‘mural’ approach to Jesus’ parables by Mt/Mk/Lk would then represent a departure from the historical Jesus and an inauthentic appropriation of the Jesus traditions.<sup>2</sup> Others consider Thomas to be composed late relative to Mt/Mk/Lk and largely dependent upon them for much of its material.<sup>3</sup> This secondary, derivative Thomas loses its character as a witness to Jesus and further distances Thomas from Mt/Mk/Lk. Thomas is not read alongside its synoptic colleagues, but instead only offers a window into second century Gnosticism.<sup>4</sup> Along these lines, if Thomas is to be related at all to Mt/Mk/Lk it is to be a relationship of parasitic dependence and its ‘data’ approach will be considered to be a deviation from a previous unity. On this reading, Thomas has extracted his sayings from the ‘murals’ of Mt/Mk/Lk and utilized them in an unnatural ‘data’ manner, likely in accordance with its foreign theological presuppositions.<sup>5</sup> In either instance, Thomas is

---

<sup>1</sup> This is the position advocated by DeConick, Davies, and Patterson. Stevan L. Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Wisdom*, 2nd ed. (Oregon House: Bardic Press, 2005); April D. DeConick, *Recovering the Original Gospel of Thomas* (London: T&T Clark, 2005); Stephen J. Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus* (Sonoma: Polebridge Press, 1993).

<sup>2</sup> See Koester and Robinson, ‘the view that the Jesus who spoke these words was and is the Living One, and thus gives life through his words, permeates the entirety of the Thomas sayings. On this basis a direct and almost unbroken continuation of Jesus’ own teaching takes place-unparalleled anywhere in the canonical tradition’. James M. Robinson and Helmut Koester, *Trajectories Through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 132. Following Robinson, Stevan Davies suggests, ‘The *logoi sophon* format is not simply early; it seems to have been the earliest form of preservation of Jesus’ sayings... Many of the sayings of Jesus in Thomas are sayings typical of the Wisdom tradition: proverbs parables, and wisdom sayings most obviously... This locates Thomas in the context of first century Christian texts, not in the context of later Gnostic mythology... Thomas may be as old as, or even older than Q’. Stevan L. Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Wisdom* (New York: Seabury Press, 1983), 16-17.

<sup>3</sup> Simon Gathercole, *The Composition of the Gospel of Thomas: Original Language and Influences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Mark Goodacre, *Thomas and the Gospels: The Making of an Apocryphal Text* (London: SPCK, 2012); H.E.W. Turner and Hugh Montefiore, *Thomas and the Evangelists* (London: SCM Press, 1962), 39.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Gärtner, ‘at that time when the *Gospel of Thomas* is supposed to have originated, there existed connections between Alexandria, Rome and Syria, all influenced by Gnostic ideas; it is in these currents that I consider that the *Gospel of Thomas* should be placed’. Beril Gärtner, *The Theology of the Gospel of Thomas* (London: Collins, 1961), 272. In response, some do not assign these Gnostic themes to Thomas’ composition, but a secondary Gnostic editing of an earlier Thomas document. R. McL. Wilson, *Studies in the Gospel of Thomas* (Oxford: A.R. Mowbray & Co. Limited, 1960), 44.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Gärtner, ‘The “narrative” sections in the Gospels were relatively unimportant in this [Gnostic] milieu: it was the sayings themselves which were vital... It may well be the case that the *Gospel of Thomas* was collected by someone who picked sayings of Jesus out of various gospel traditions, tracts and homiletical traditions... A consideration of this background makes it easier to understand how the *Gospel of Thomas* came to take the form of a collection of sayings of Jesus, and nothing more’. Gärtner, *The Theology of the Gospel of Thomas*, 34. See also Schröter, ‘the writings originating in the second century [including the Gospel of Thomas] presuppose already-existing stories about Jesus but are not bound by them, either in their language or in the interpretation of their content. Rather it is characteristic of them that they choose different literary genres for their treatment of the Jesus traditions—such as the revelatory dialogue or the sayings collection—and thus also attach different accents to the content’. Jens Schröter, *Jesus and the Canon: The Early Jesus Traditions in the Context of*

not directly comparable to Mt/Mk/Lk and is either esteemed or demoted on the basis of its compositional dating relative to Mt/Mk/Lk.

Within this context it will be argued that Thomas and its 'data' approach should be understood as a fourth synoptic witness since it is neither a late deviation from an unblemished synoptic trajectory, nor is it an early, independent witness to the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus. Instead, Thomas is both early *and* late as it is the product of an ongoing compositional process stretching from the Coptic text through the Greek fragments to its origins roughly contemporary with Mt/Mk/Lk. This leveling of the playing field will effectively establish the basis of comparison of parables between Thomas and the synoptics and will enable my conclusions about 'data' and 'mural' approaches to be extended into the pre-canonical era of early Christian gospel writing. If Thomas was written well after the close of the 'synoptic canon', then its 'data' approach may be construed as a *deviation* from an otherwise harmonious narrative trajectory. Such a possibility is explicitly forestalled here and neither the 'data' interpretation of Jesus' parables found in the Gospel of Thomas nor the narrative, 'mural' interpretation of Jesus' parables within Mt/Mk/Lk have a claim to greater historical or theological credibility on the basis of their historical priority. Consequently, through a detailed study of the Greek and Coptic texts of Thomas, the following points will be argued regarding Thomas' compositional procedure:

1. Between the Greek and Coptic texts, several sayings demonstrate a wide degree of textual and theological change, indicating that Thomas existed in many different editions through time.
2. Nevertheless, some sayings of Thomas demonstrate very little difference between these texts to suggest that a degree of stability is possible. This is particularly for sayings like the parables whose cohesive internal structure resists substantial alteration.

---

the Origins of the New Testament Canon,' in *Performing the Gospels: Orality, Memory, and Mark*, ed. Richard A. Horsley, Jonathan A. Draper, and John Miles Foley (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 115. Finally, see the recent contribution by Goodacre, for whom Thomas' literary form reflects its theological desire to appear enigmatic and mysterious: 'It is in this generic decision, to write a book of sayings rather than, say, another narrative gospel, that we gain insight into how *Thomas* used the Synoptics. It is too easy to confuse genre (sayings book) with origins and tradition history. Indeed, it is a mark of the success of *Thomas*'s project that we go digging for oral traditions behind the book, ultimately looking for a location in the historical Jesus' own ministry, rather than reflecting on how it is that one puts a book like this together, and that its author's choice of genre tells us about his theological preferences'. Goodacre, *Thomas and the Gospels*, 145.



3. Change within this compositional process has not unfolded in a strictly unitary or predictable fashion, but through a plurality of influences arising from Thomas' temporal and geographic movement.
4. The variability and stability of the Thomas textual family can be projected backwards in time beyond the Oxyrhynchus fragments toward Thomas' origins, roughly contemporary with Mt/Mk/Lk.
5. The Thomasine tradition was the product of a dynamic compositional process – what I call a 'family tree' model of composition – where each successive edition of Thomas may retain prior sayings, while giving rise to new and rewritten sayings.<sup>6</sup>
6. Given the competing pressures of preservation and creativity present throughout Thomas' compositional history, the issue of dependence upon Mt/Mk/Lk must be judged on a case-by-case basis.
7. The Coptic text of Thomas represents just one of several nonlinear compositional histories that began as an informal collection or collections of Jesus' sayings which underwent frequent redaction over time.
8. It follows there is no single author or composition date for the Gospel of Thomas, but a long redactional process taking many forms.

---

<sup>6</sup> This general position regarding Thomas' composition history has several forerunners and its restatement into the current context has several implications for the current debate. It was H.C. Puech who first suggested in 1959 that Thomas could have possibly undergone numerous changes in its history, noting, 'The composition of a collection of this kind, which may be readily enlarged, compressed or altered at the whim of the compiler, is subject, or at least was probably subject, to constant change. We have in fact proof that there were different recensions of our work, and we cannot consider that which we now possess, thanks to the Nag Hammadi papyrus, as either the first or the final version. It is hazardous, and probably indeed misguided, to seek to visualize its original form and determine its origin'. H.-Ch. Puech, 'The Gospel of Thomas,' in *New Testament Apocrypha*, ed. E. Hennecke and W. Schneemelcher (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), 296. See also Hurtado, 'it is important to note, however, that the Greek fragments indicate that *GThomas* was transmitted with a noticeable fluidity in contents and arrangement'. L. W. Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts and Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 34.

9. Consequently, the stark polarity between early and late compositional dates is inappropriately applied to Thomas since Thomas is both early *and* late.

In sum, Thomas shows many signs of being a textual tradition which is constantly subject to creative modification. There is neither a single author of the Gospel of Thomas nor a single edition of Thomas. Instead, there were multiple Thomases that circulated at various times and places within its over 300 year composition history stretching from Nag Hammadi back toward the late first century. This forestalls both the Gospel of Thomas and Mt/Mk/Lk from having any unique claim to historical or theological priority, thereby opening the possibility of a genuine synoptic comparison between the four gospels and their inherent hermeneutical approaches.

What follows is a backwards reading of the Thomasine tradition from the Coptic text toward Thomas' genesis. Comparing the three Greek fragments with the Coptic text of Thomas will show both the stability and wide variability of Thomas between these texts' compositions.<sup>7</sup> Thomas' frequent, but irregular redaction will then be demonstrated by examining the genre of Thomas itself and its evolution through time. If successful, this will locate the Gospel of Thomas and its 'data' approach within the debate about early Christian gospel composition and firmly place the Gospel of Thomas and Mt/Mk/Lk within a common synoptic plane. This will establish that the interpretive practices of the early church were not uniformly 'data' or 'mural', as both were simultaneously operative within early Christianity.

### 1. A 'Family Tree' Model and Current Positions on Thomas' Composition

Much like the passing down of genetic family traits and traditions from generation to generation, the textual tradition of Thomas is passed down from text to text. From its origins as a simple collection of Jesus' teachings until its 'final' edition represented by the Coptic text, the genesis of each new edition of Thomas provides new opportunities to alter, omit, expand, or preserve Jesus' teachings. Like the inheritance of dominant genetic traits, some sayings will be handed down unadulterated by time and with little perceptible change. Other sayings, like recessive genes, will pass into obscurity in the next generation of texts through their drastic rewriting or their removal altogether. Still other sayings will adopt innovative meanings

---

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Richard Valantasis, who suggests the Greek fragments 'represent distinct collections of material that (when compared to the more complete Coptic text) provide a window into the way these sayings were distributed and disseminated'. Richard Valantasis, *The Gospel of Thomas* (London: Routledge, 1997), 30.

through their relocation with the sayings collection. The creation of new editions of Thomas, as with the procreation of children, is not an asexual or incestuous process internal to a lone community, but requires the introduction of foreign ‘genes’, or the hermeneutical pressures arising from new temporal and geographic horizons as the Thomasine family rapidly spreads throughout the interactive diversity of early Christianity.<sup>8</sup> It follows that changes in Thomas may occur from ‘oral’ processes – their use and interpretation by the community or an individual<sup>9</sup> – but specifically within a written medium through the creation of new textual editions. As versions of Thomas were disseminated into various social and theological contexts it was modified in response to those contexts, both positively in agreement or negatively in antithesis.

As such, there is no single, authoritative version of the Gospel of Thomas, but multiple Thomases in varying recensions within a continuous and somewhat stable textual family. In both the similarities and differences, the Greek and the Coptic texts point toward this ‘family tree’ model of composition as each text has shaped its common tradition. Between the four textual witnesses, Greek and Coptic texts testify to four alternate textual traditions of various origins.<sup>10</sup> Standing at the end of this long compositional process, the Coptic text contains within it new sayings and new interpretations of old traditions while also preserving within it a genetic heritage that may date back to its first composition. If a ‘family tree’ model of composition can be reasonably demonstrated, then this problematizes a number of current scholarly positions on the composition and date of the Gospel of Thomas, which inadequately address the problem of differences between the Coptic text and the Greek fragments.

---

<sup>8</sup> A term coined recently by L. W. Hurtado, ‘Interactive Diversity: A Proposed Model of Christian Origins,’ *Journal of Theological Studies* 64, no. 2 (2013). Both the textual evidence of Thomas and the wide geographical location of its many named *testimonia* suggest that the *Thomas* enjoyed a wide readership within early Christianity, and therefore the possibility of alternate versions of the gospel according to its various geographic settings may be likely. Simon Gathercole, ‘Named Testimonia to the Gospel of Thomas: An Expanded Inventory and Analysis,’ *Harvard Theological Review* 105, no. 1 (2012); L. W. Hurtado, ‘The Greek Fragments of “The Gospel of Thomas” as Artefacts: Papyrological Observations on P.Oxy.1, P.Oxy.654, and P.Oxy.655,’ in *Das Thomasevangelium: Entstehung–Rezeption–Theologie*, ed. Jörg Frey, Enno Edzard Popkes, and Jens Schröter (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> On the commonalities between communal performance and individual reading, see Gadamer, ‘there is obviously no sharp differentiation between reciting and silent reading. Reading with understanding is always a kind of reproduction, performance and interpretation’. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Second Revised ed. (London: Continuum, 2004), 153.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Hurtado, ‘It is, I think, unlikely that [the Greek fragments] derive directly from a common archetype. If so, then these several copies of *GThom* probably derive from a preceding equivalent number of prior copies’. Hurtado, ‘The Greek Fragments of “The Gospel of Thomas” as Artefacts: Papyrological Observations on P.Oxy.1, P.Oxy.654, and P.Oxy.655,’ 31.

### 1.1. An Early, Independent Thomas

The search for Thomas' composition date begins with a brief overview of the contribution by Stevan Davies, providing a natural departure point for other compositional theories. Davies proposes a largely unified Thomas located firmly within early Christianity prior to Mt/Mk/Lk. Following Robinson and Koester, Thomas is classified within the genre of Jewish wisdom, or *logoi sophōn*, and therefore can be placed within roughly 50-70 CE. This Thomas is a principally static composition with little to no variation after its composition. Sayings which overlap with Mt/Mk/Lk originate from Thomas' access to early oral tradition and show no signs of dependence upon these texts.<sup>11</sup> The Thomas that emerges from Davies' hypothesis is situated among some of the earliest Christian writings, without any sign of canonical adulteration.

One of the major benefits of Davies' approach is his attempt to understand Thomas not according to its affinities or dependence upon supposed Gnostic motifs, but instead coordinates Thomas with what we already know about early Christianity. Even its non-Mt/Mk/Lk sayings, though they may appear to be obscure, are readily intelligible within early Christianity and Jewish wisdom.<sup>12</sup> This avoids the circularity of arguments for Thomas' Gnostic character. However, beyond this initial virtue, the proposal of a unified, early Thomas inadequately accounts for the many places where indebtedness to Mt/Mk/Lk is unavoidably clear. Despite being an un-Gnostic Thomas, Davies' Thomas has little to no relation to its fellow synoptic counterparts. Additionally, Davies overlooks the variations and literary seams present within Thomas, either within the Coptic text or between the Coptic and the Greek.<sup>13</sup>

### 1.2. A 'Rolling Corpus' Compositional Model

Instead of the stable, unified, Thomasine tradition suggested by Davies, April DeConick advocates what she calls a 'rolling corpus' model of Thomas' transmission, whereby an

---

<sup>11</sup> 'What then is the Gospel of Thomas? It is a collection of sayings attributed to Jesus, some authentic and some not. Its background is that of Jewish Wisdom speculation. It is wholly independent of the New Testament gospels; most probably it was in existence before they were written. It should be dated A.D. 50-70'. Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Wisdom*, 146.

<sup>12</sup> 'Most of these sayings can be explicated through reference to Jewish and Christian materials of the first century and before. We need never resort to late or gnostic texts to explicate the Gospel of Thomas'. Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Wisdom*, 35.

<sup>13</sup> For Davies, differences are to be explained on text-critical ground, 'we can see from the Oxyrhynchus papyri that some (although not overmuch) alteration in sayings order occurred in the process of textual transmission'. Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Wisdom*, 155.

original list of kernel of sayings, 'served as a trigger for additional materials to accrue from other literary texts and from traditions drawn from the oral world when the preacher instructed the community'.<sup>14</sup> This sophisticated model represents a fusion between Wilson's 'snow-ball' compositional model<sup>15</sup> and Gilles Quispel's suggestion<sup>16</sup> that Thomas is a composite of three separate sources: Jewish, hermetic, and encratic. The 'kernel gospel' originates within an originally Jewish-Christian community and is handed down adapted by the community in sharp separation from Mt/Mk/Lk influence. From its genesis until its culmination in the Coptic translation in Nag Hammadi, it is the Thomasine community's use of the text which prompts Thomas to continually adapt to new questions and challenges.

It is important to note that DeConick's model is unequivocally linear: the text has been handed down and reformed by a single Thomasine community<sup>17</sup> evolving according to discrete stages corresponding to communal controversies such as the communal crises of leadership, the accommodation to Gentiles, the death of the eyewitnesses, and various shifts in eschatological thought. Moreover, while this community existed concurrently with the composition of Mt/Mk/Lk, it stood entirely independent of their influence. DeConick's evolutionary view of Thomas' composition seems, on the whole, to be a step in the right direction. However the linearity of her model becomes problematic when comparing the Greek and Coptic fragments. While she may suggest that the 'instability' found between the Greek and the Coptic texts embodies the oral mentality of the Thomasine community, the differences between these texts contribute very little to DeConick's reconstruction of Thomas' step-wise evolution. For her, the majority of the Coptic-Greek differences are not the product of oral performances of a multivalent sayings collection, but scribal errors of a formalized text. Consequently, DeConick's reconstruction of the history of the Thomasine community ends at the surprisingly early date of 120 CE, roughly 80 years prior to the transcription of the first Greek fragment. I suspect this is so because the type of meticulous, highly speculative reconstruction of Thomas' variable history paradoxically requires a stabilized text to analyze. If Thomas underwent drastic revisions between the Greek and Coptic versions, precise statements about Thomas prior to the Greek fragments may bear a lower degree of certainty

---

<sup>14</sup> DeConick, *Recovering the Original Gospel of Thomas*, 59.

<sup>15</sup> R. McL. Wilson, "'Thomas' and the Growth of the Gospels," *Harvard Theological Review* 53, no. 4 (1960).

<sup>16</sup> Gilles Quispel, "The Gospel of Thomas and the New Testament," *Vigiliae Christianae* 11 (1957); R. McL. Wilson, "Thomas and the Synoptic Gospels," *Expository Times* 72 (1960).

<sup>17</sup> The Gospel of Thomas is, 'a repository of communal memory containing not only the early and later traditions but also the reformulations of these traditions based on the contemporary experience of the community'. DeConick, *Recovering the Original Gospel of Thomas*, 161.

than DeConick suggests. This is especially true when DeConick considers the question of Mt/Mk/Lk influence or independence, which is mistakenly determined by virtue of its supposedly primitive character and compared with the Mt/Mk/Lk parallels.

If a ‘rolling-corpus’ model implies the smooth, linear redaction of accumulating sayings within a single community and text, by contrast a ‘family tree’ model of composition suggests that the frequent redaction of Thomas occurred within a variety of communal contexts and in an enigmatically erratic fashion. In the same way that members within a family share a common genetic heritage while also diverging greatly, the Coptic and Greek texts offer multiple recensions of the same textual family—from possibly multiple communities—which push and pull in unpredictably opposing directions. Given this instability, it is nearly impossible, as DeConick does, to predict its original form and precise evolutionary history. Additionally, precisely because of its compositional diversity Thomas has not existed independent from the influence of Mt/Mk/Lk, but has been readily affected by their testimonies and stands within their trajectory as a fourth synoptic witness.

### 1.3. A Late, Dependent Thomas

Recent scholarship by Gathercole and Goodacre has directly challenged the somewhat recent consensus of an early Thomas independent of Mt/Mk/Lk.<sup>18</sup> For both these scholars, Thomas is an originally Greek gospel<sup>19</sup> which shows many signs of influence from Mt/Mk/Lk, either through verbatim quotations by Thomas<sup>20</sup> or the replication of Lukan and Matthean redactions of Mark.<sup>21</sup> On the basis of these clear cases of indebtedness, both Gathercole and Goodacre suggest that all of Thomas’ Mt/Mk/Lk-like material is dependent upon Mt/Mk/Lk. Gathercole likens his examination to a blood test, where one can assume that blood taken from the arm (clear instances of Mt/Mk/Lk dependence) can be said to be representative of the blood found throughout the circulation system (the Gospel of Thomas as a whole).<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Goodacre employs the analogy of plagiarism. If a student can be shown to plagiarize one source it can be inferred that other parallels are also dependent upon that

---

<sup>18</sup> Gathercole, *The Composition of the Gospel of Thomas*; Goodacre, *Thomas and the Gospels*.

<sup>19</sup> Gathercole, *The Composition of the Gospel of Thomas*, 19-125.

<sup>20</sup> Goodacre, *Thomas and the Gospels*, 33-48.

<sup>21</sup> Gathercole, *The Composition of the Gospel of Thomas*, 168-224; Goodacre, *Thomas and the Gospels*, 66-108.

<sup>22</sup> Gathercole, *The Composition of the Gospel of Thomas*, 213-14.

source.<sup>23</sup> For this inference to be true, it requires that Thomas was written at one time by a single author with written or oral access to Mt/Mk/Lk. Thomas has composed his sayings on the basis of the Mt/Mk/Lk sources, editing and modifying these sources according to his theological preferences. Therefore both Gathercole and Goodacre contend that the Gospel of Thomas is a late composition relative to Mt/Mk/Lk by a single author.

In defense of a Thomas which is late and dependent upon Mt/Mk/Lk, Gathercole offers some germane criticisms of the ‘rolling-corpus’ model of composition and, by extension, the ‘family tree’ model offered here. Gathercole writes:

There is the matter of whether *Thomas* has undergone modification, after composition, in its translation into Coptic and (either before or after translation) in its textual transmission. This is very much more likely in principle, but the extent of this modification seems rather small.... The translation is not literal, but neither is it a different recension or an ‘Überarbeitung’. The only major differences are in the order of sayings 30/77 and the considerable abbreviation in the Coptic of *GTh* 36.<sup>24</sup>

The main criticism he directs at a ‘rolling-corpus’ model is what he perceives to be the ‘considerable similarity’ between the Greek and the Coptic texts. Gathercole observes that, within parallel sayings between the Greek and Coptic texts, 24 of the 27 Greek loanwords found in the Coptic are replicated in the Greek. If minor variations have arisen after Thomas’ composition they have principally occurred during Thomas’ translation into Coptic, noting the uniform reticence to use the Coptic word for God, NOΥΤΕ.<sup>25</sup> However, as will be shown below, the categorization of ‘considerable similarity’ overlooks the theological implications of the textual differences. Finally, Gathercole judges the Gospel of Thomas to reflect not inconsistency, but the kind of unity one might expect from a single composition. These criticisms do not explicitly indicate a wholesale rejection of the compositional procedure proposed here,<sup>26</sup> but they mute the degree of variability possible and gesture toward a later date for the completion of Thomas’ composition.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Goodacre, *Thomas and the Gospels*, 54-56.

<sup>24</sup> Gathercole, *The Composition of the Gospel of Thomas*, 161.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Gathercole, *The Composition of the Gospel of Thomas*, 161-65.

<sup>26</sup> Gathercole notably does allow for the possibility of some differences between the Greek and Coptic texts suggesting, ‘Clearly the Coptic is not a straightforward literal translation that would enable us to reconstruct the Greek behind it. There are various kinds of differences, including substitutions, as well as additions and subtractions (although we cannot necessarily distinguish between instances of these two). It is often difficult, however, even in the four most substantive cases above, to see any sort of consistent redactional programme or theological *Tendenz* in the translation or transmission process’. Simon Gathercole, *The Gospel of Thomas: Introduction and Commentary*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Wendy J. Porter, vol. 11, TENT (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 19.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Gathercole, ‘if any of these stratification theories is correct, then the influence of Matthew and Luke is upon sayings which are generally attributed to the earliest phase of composition’. Gathercole, *The Composition of the Gospel of Thomas*, 222.

Gathercole and Goodacre have convincingly shown that Thomas does show some signs of dependence upon Mt/Mk/Lk.<sup>28</sup> But if Thomas is the product of a long compositional process, then it remains possible that an existing Thomas saying has been redacted under the influence of Mt/Mk/Lk. Consequently, Thomas' dependence upon Mt/Mk/Lk must be judged on a case-by-case basis and it is not self-evident that indebtedness to Mt/Mk/Lk demands a late date for Thomas' composition. If Thomas was a fluid, highly impressionable sayings collection, then one would expect this type of dynamic interaction and debate between synoptic traditions. This dependence of Thomas need not imply a secondary status, but instead reinforces its similarity and common interest in shared traditions.

#### 1.4. Which Thomas?

Finally, it is worth highlighting the recent work by Wilfried Eisele,<sup>29</sup> which examines the differences between the Greek and Coptic texts of Thomas to better understand the history of its transmission. Eisele questions the assumption of the unity between the Greek and Coptic texts. He offers a detailed comparison of the texts, finding substantial differences between the two. He concludes, 'we must accept that we are not dealing with a single Gospel of Thomas'.<sup>30</sup> For Eisele, the differences between the Greek and Coptic texts of Thomas cannot be explained according to text-critical assumptions of a single textual tradition. Instead, these texts each represent different recensions of the Gospel of Thomas. If there was no single Thomas text, this overturns the singular, evolutionary model of Thomas' composition offer by DeConick, as well as the proposals of a single, unified Thomas offered by Davies, Gathercole and Goodacre.

Eisele helpfully highlights several differences between the Greek and Coptic texts and much of the present study is indebted to his findings, which highlight the instability of Thomas and its diachronic nature. However, Eisele's work is mostly negative—questioning the assumed unity of Thomas' text witnesses. This argument is somewhat one-sided, as he does not offer any positive instance of similarity between texts. Moreover, Eisele does not take the further step to outline a comprehensive compositional history for Thomas. While there are multiple

---

<sup>28</sup> See Kloppenborg's review of Gathercole and Goodacre's book, where he admits that 'Thomas does reflect Synoptic elements'. John S. Kloppenborg, 'A New Synoptic Problem: Mark Goodacre and Simon Gathercole on Thomas,' *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 36, no. 3 (2014), 226.

<sup>29</sup> Wilfried Eisele, *Welcher Thomas?* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).

<sup>30</sup> 'Wir müssen akzeptieren, dass wir es bei dem Thomasevangelium nicht mit einem einzigen Thomas zu tun haben'. Eisele, *Welcher Thomas?*, 249-50.



editions of Thomas, they are nevertheless somehow related to one another through a common compositional process.

### 1.5. Methodological Considerations

The issue of comparing the Greek and Coptic texts is not so much recognizing the difference between the Coptic and Greek texts, but the evaluation of that difference. One reason that the differences between the Greek and Coptic texts have been overlooked is that they have commonly been assumed to be textual variants of the same text. Though the transcriptions of the Greek texts are separated by around 100 years, the possibility of difference between these texts is overlooked as they are often treated as witnesses to a single Greek edition of Thomas.<sup>31</sup> The issue of the Coptic and Greek texts is assumed to be a textual critical one and one simply needed to employ the tools of textual criticism to determine which reading was preferred. Omissions are deemed to be accidental rather than deliberate or the product of a corrupted text.<sup>32</sup> In the present study, discrepancies between the texts will not be dismissed as variant readings from a hypothetical original norm, but as valid representations of the Gospel of Thomas. This comparison between the Greek and the Coptic texts is somewhat complicated by the fragmentary nature of the Greek texts, which often are reconstructed on the basis of the Coptic text. In practice, this severely limits the number of possible variations between the two.<sup>33</sup> So while it is possible to suggest a reading of a lacuna in the Greek fragments which differs from the Coptic, such instances are rare and can only be tentatively suggested.

A second reason why differences between Greek and Coptic are overlooked is that these differences are far too often quantified rather than interpreted. It is not enough to simply recognize variations between texts without asking what these differences mean for the interpretation of the texts themselves.<sup>34</sup> Many differences may appear to be small in scale, but

---

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, in Harold Attridge's introduction to the Greek fragments. While he disputes Marcovich's conclusion that the Greek fragments attest to a single form of the text, he nevertheless incidentally speaks of a single Greek text, beginning his introduction with, 'Fragments of three different manuscripts of the Greek text of the *GTh* have survived'. Harold W. Attridge, 'Appendix: the Greek Fragments,' in *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2-7: Gospel According to Thomas, Gospel According to Philip, Hypostasis of the Archons, and Indexes.*, ed. Bentley Layton, Nag Hammadi Studies XX: The Coptic Gnostic Library (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989), 96, 102.

<sup>32</sup> Attridge, 'Appendix: the Greek Fragments,' 101.

<sup>33</sup> A point colorfully illustrated by the sometimes wildly different reconstructions of the Oxyrhynchus papyri before the discovery of the Coptic. For a comprehensive list, see J.A. Fitzmyer, 'The Oxyrhynchus Logoi of Jesus and the Coptic Gospel according to Thomas,' *Theological Studies* 20 (1959).

<sup>34</sup> A point emphasized by Bart Ehrman, in his classic work on the theological effects of textual differences, 'significance cannot simply be quantified... The importance of theologically oriented variations, on

result in widely dissimilar interpretations. This is true within canonical texts like John 1.18, but it is especially true of a sayings collection like the Gospel of Thomas. The compact nature of the sayings entails that even a small change in wording can have far-reaching results.

Therefore, the magnitude of variation between the Greek and Coptic texts must be weighed according to both the quantity of change and the resultant theological divergence.<sup>35</sup> This is especially true if one recognizes, as Ulrich Schmidt has suggested,<sup>36</sup> that many changes to texts reflect the interpretive aims of readers. It is therefore more likely that theologically significant variations should not be understood to be accidental, but hermeneutically significant. In comparison to the Coptic text, each of the Oxyrhynchus papyri offers the distinct ways that the Thomasine family has been altered toward different ends, either through small changes to existing sayings, the transposition of sayings, or the radical rewriting of sayings.

## 2. A More Orthodox Thomas (Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 654)

Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 654 dates roughly to the middle or end of the third century,<sup>37</sup> and contains the beginning six sayings of the Gospel of Thomas. The sayings contain much linguistic overlap and are presented in exactly the same order between the Greek and Coptic texts. On the whole, there are numerous differences between the Coptic and the Greek text, with each saying having at least some minor, if not major, variation as the Thomasine tradition traveled from Oxyrhynchus to Nag Hammadi. These variations simultaneously highlight the variable and stable nature of Thomas' composition. On the one hand, the many minor variations have significant theological impact and reflect a quite different *Sitz im Leben*. On the other hand, these variations are small in quantitative scale, but large in theological significance.

---

the other hand, far outweighs their actual numerical count'. Bart D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 322.

<sup>35</sup> By contrast, the differences between the Greek and Coptic texts of Thomas are of a different order and magnitude than the many textual divergences found within the New Testament manuscripts. The scribes of the New Testament had 'a general attitude of fidelity to the text and a willingness to change the text to make it say what it was known to mean' rather than the free re-writing of sayings we find in Thomas'. Michael J. Kruger, 'Early Christian Attitudes toward the Reproduction of Texts,' in *The Early Texts of the New Testament*, ed. Charles E. Hill and Michael J. Kruger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 80.

<sup>36</sup> Ulrich Schmidt, 'Scribes and Variants: Sociology and Typology,' in *Textual Variation: Theological and Social Tendencies?*, ed. H. A. G. Houghton and D. C. Parker (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2008).

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Bernard P. Grenfell and Arthur S. Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri: Part IV* (Oxford: Horace Hart, 1904), 1.

## 2.1. Finding, Marveling, (Being Disturbed), Resting, and Reigning (Saying 2)

[λέγει Ἰη(σοῦ)ς]· μὴ παυσάσθω ὁ ζη[τῶν τοῦ ζητεῖν ἕως ἂν] εὕρῃ, καὶ ὅταν εὕρῃ  
[θαμβηθήσεται, καὶ θαμ]βηθεὶς βασιλεύσῃ, κα[ὶ βασιλεύσας ἐπαναπα]ήσεται.<

[Jesus said]: ‘Let the one who se[eks] not stop [seeking until he should] find and when he would find [he will be amazed and being am]azed, he will reign an[d reigning he will re]st’.

ΠΕΧΕ Ιϸ ΧΕ ΜΗΤΡΕϸΛΟ ΝΔΙ ΠΕΤΩΙΝΕ ΕϸΩΙΝΕ ΨΑΝΤΕϸΔΙΝΕ ΔΥΩ ΖΟΤΑΝ  
ΕϸΨΑΝΤΔΙΝΕ ϸΙΝΔΨΤΡ̄ΤΡ̄ ΔΥΩ ΕϸΨΑΝΨΤΟΡΤΡ̄ ϸΙΝΔΡ̄ΨΠΗΡΕ ΔΥΩ ϸΙΝΔΡ̄ ΡΡΟ ΕΧΜ̄  
ΠΤΗΡϸ

Jesus said, ‘Let the one who seeks not stop seeking until he find, and when he should find, he will be disturbed, and if he should be disturbed, he will be amazed, and he will reign over everything’.

Much of Saying 2 in the Greek and Coptic texts is identical, containing the same overall sorites structure and stepwise progression. However, there are two key differences between the Coptic and the Greek. The Coptic adds the phrase ‘when he finds he will be troubled [ϸΙΝΔΨΤΡ̄ΤΡ̄], and if he is troubled he will be amazed’ while the Greek phrase moves directly from finding to amazement.<sup>38</sup> Additionally, both sayings offer different desired outcomes for the one who seeks. In the Coptic, the seeker’s journey culminates with his reigning over everything, while the Greek suggests that the seeker will rest in the end. The Coptic text exemplifies a process of extension whereby the content or form of an original saying is expanded into new areas.<sup>39</sup> It

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Petri Luomanen, *Recovering Jewish-Christian Sects and Gospels* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 205. Between the Greek and Coptic there is a slight ambiguity whether θαμβέω should be correlated with ΨΠΗΡΕ or ΨΤΟΡΤΡ̄. Attridge suggests it is to be connected to ΨΤΟΡΤΡ̄, while Fieger suggests the opposite. Attridge, ‘Appendix: the Greek Fragments,’ 100; Michael Fieger, *Das Thomasevangelium: Einleitung, Kommentar und Systematik* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1992), 20-21. Crum’s Coptic Dictionary is not a great help here as θαμβέω is only directly related to ΤΖΡΩ (p. 461a) and relates to ΨΠΗΡΕ or ΨΤΟΡΤΡ̄ only in its intensified form ἐκθαμβέω (p. 581, 597-98) W. E. Crum, *A Coptic Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939). But comparing the two Coptic terms, ΨΠΗΡΕ seems to have a more natural association with θαμβέω, which is usually translated as to be astonished or amazed. Therefore θαμβέω does not obviously have the negative connotation of ΨΤΟΡΤΡ̄ and should instead be associated with ΨΠΗΡΕ. Moreover, Clement’s assimilation of θαμβέω to θαυμάσας in his *Strom.* v.14.96.3 further associates θαμβέω with ΨΠΗΡΕ. H. G. Liddell and Robert Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon, Founded upon the Seventh Edition of Liddell and Scott’s Greek-English Lexicon*, Seventh ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945).

<sup>39</sup> For a detailed comparison along these lines between Thomas and Clement’s citations of the Gospel to the Hebrews, see Eisele, who notes that the Coptic’s ϸΙΝΔΡ̄ ΡΡΟ ΕΧΜ̄ ΠΤΗΡϸ may have arisen from a

should be noted that these alterations most probably have occurred through a written, rather than an exclusively oral medium, where the new versions of the saying contain verbatim agreement with an original version, while also further expanding its original logic.

The seeking and finding motif is ubiquitous throughout the Gospel of Thomas and its inclusion here at the very beginning can be said to be programmatic for the book as a whole. This heightened importance of the saying further magnifies the implications of variants between the versions of the Gospel. In the Coptic, the inclusion of ‘troubled’ into the sorites chain adds an unexpected disruption to an otherwise smooth chain of events. The act of finding is initially troubling before one marvels at what has been found. The disturbance of the seeker emphasizes the necessity of a negative reaction prior to the positive. Rather than a smooth process from seeking to reigning, finding is a revelatory interruption in the understanding and expectations of the seeker. This initial shock gives way to a sense of wonder at the depth of this new-found understanding. Such unanticipated shock is mirrored throughout the rest of the Coptic text, especially in Sayings 56 and 80,<sup>40</sup> both of which express the initial negative outcome of discovery (a corpse or a body) which then transforms to further illumination (the world is not worthy of him). Comparatively, in the Greek fragment the movement from seeking to rest is an unbroken, logical succession of causes and effects. Here, finding is the fulfillment of the intentions of the seeker and the revelation more closely corresponds to the expectations of the seeker than the Coptic text, which explicitly subverts the expectations of the seeker on the way toward complete divine illumination. If the Coptic edition of Thomas emphasizes the stark conversionary nature of Christian discipleship, the Greek edition envisions this discipleship to be one of stepwise progression. As noted above, the disturbing nature of revelation is a consistent theme in the Coptic text. The absence of this theme in P.Oxy.654 is perhaps a strong indication of its further distance from the Coptic.

---

substitution of the Greek’s ἐπαναπαύσεται to the similar reading ἐπάνω πάντα. Eisele, *Welcher Thomas?*, 70-75. For more on the interrelation of the Thomas and the text known to Clement of Alexandria as Gospel to the Hebrews, see Francis Watson, *Gospel Writing: A Canonical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 233-36.

<sup>40</sup> Saying 56, ‘Jesus said, “Whoever has known the world has found a corpse and whoever has found a corpse, the world is not worth of him”’. Saying 80, ‘Jesus said, “Whoever has known the world has found a body. But whoever has found a body, the world is not worthy of him”’. Cf. Luomanen, who notes the connection between ‘disturbance’ and the reference to a corpse in Saying 56. Luomanen, *Recovering Jewish-Christian Sects and Gospels*, 205-06. See also the cycle of parables in Sayings 96-98, where each parable climaxes precisely at the moment of discovery or recognition on the part of the protagonist. In Saying 96, the woman hides leaven in dough, only to discover that it has inadvertently produced bread. Likewise in Saying 97, there is a stark contrast between the woman’s not knowing (ΝΕCCΟΥΝ ΔΝ) that the jar was broken and her later finding it to be empty (ΔC2Θ ΕΠΟCΙ ΕCΨΟΥΕΙΤ). Finally in Saying 98, a man prepares to kill a powerful man and surprisingly and unintentionally kills him.

Additionally, if both the Greek and Coptic begin with an initial deficiency, the outcomes of the Greek and Coptic sorites series culminate in divergent goals for the Christian life, suggesting two different visions of the Christian life regarding human agency and wholeness. The Greek, ending in ‘rest’, emphasizes the passivity of the realized seeker.<sup>41</sup> Within the saying, the ultimate goal of rest is implicitly contrasted with the vigilant activity of the seeker as the one who seeks must persevere until he has finally found rest.<sup>42</sup> Incomplete and unperfected life is marked by striving and seeking and it is specifically the end of such striving in the place of rest which is the ultimate goal of Christian life. This corresponds to Sayings 60 and 90 within the Coptic text which likewise emphasize rest as the final goal of the Christian life.<sup>43</sup> By contrast, the goal of rest as the end of the sorites chain is omitted in the Coptic edition of Thomas and replaced with the rule of the seeker over all (‘...and if he should be disturbed, he will be amazed, and he will reign over everything’).<sup>44</sup> The insertion of ‘ruling’ over ‘rest’ loses the natural contrast between seeking and rest implied in the exhortation ‘must not stop seeking’, thereby suggesting in the Coptic text that the exertion of seeking is largely congruous with its end goal of reigning. Consequently, if in the Greek text seeking is an imperfect, but necessary precursor before a time when all strivings will cease, for the Coptic such activity is an accepted step within an *ordo salutis* which offers no direct critique of human agency.

The Greek form of the saying is very similar to one found in the Gospel to the Hebrews (GHeb), which is referred to twice in Clement of Alexandria. Clement first quotes the saying in its entirety without attribution or negative assessment of its contents. This quote in Clement is nearly an exact duplicate of the saying as it appears in P.Oxy.654. Later on, a more brief form of the saying is produced and attributed to the Gospel to the Hebrews.<sup>45</sup> Such strong parallels between the P.Oxy.654 and GHeb strongly suggests a relationship exists between these texts. It

---

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Valantasis, *The Gospel of Thomas*, 57.

<sup>42</sup> Klauck rightly notes that the saying, ‘contains an intentional paradox’ between the rest one desires and the means by which it is realized. Hans-Josef Klauck, *Apocryphal Gospels: An Introduction* (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 39.

<sup>43</sup> For a further discussion of the rest motif in Thomas and its relationship to the Greek and Coptic texts, see Eisele, *Welcher Thomas?*, 81-96.

<sup>44</sup> The verb  $\text{CINAPPO}$  has the straightforward meaning of reigning. The only other occurrence of it is in Saying 81, which exhorts those who have become rich to become kings ( $\text{ΠΕΝΤΑΖΩΡΡΗΜΑΟ ΜΑΡΕCIPPO}$ ). This implies that reigning is a negative outcome since the saying continues to demand that those who have power deny it ( $\text{ΠΕΤΕΥΗΤΑCΙ ΝΟΥΔΥΝΑΜΙC ΜΑΡΕCΙΔΑΡΗΑ}$ ).

<sup>45</sup> ‘So also in the Gospel to the Hebrews it is written: “The one who wonders shall reign, and the one who has reigned shall rest” (Clement, *Clementis Alexandrini opera quae Exstant Omnia*, ii.9.45.15.). The verb choice  $\text{θαυμάσας}$  over  $\text{θαμβέω}$  is not a substantive change, but an assimilation to Clement’s context. The fuller quotation, not attributed to the Gospel to the Hebrews, is found in Strom. v.14.96.3, ‘The one who seeks will not cease until he finds, and when he finds he will be amazed, and being amazed he will reign, and reigning he will rest.’

may be that Thomas is directly dependent upon GHeb for Saying 2, as well as for other possible parallels to GHeb (Sayings 12, 72, 90, 101). It could also be the case that Thomas and GHeb are dependent upon a common tradition.<sup>46</sup> In either case, Thomas' strong similarity to GHeb demonstrates its indebtedness to a wide variety of Jesus traditions outside of Mt/Mk/Lk. Much like Matthew's incorporation of supplementary material outside of Mark, these additions are to be expected within any synoptic relationship. The question then becomes whether Thomas' dependence upon a pre-GHeb source or GHeb can be said to be the original, conservative Jewish-Christian kernel of the Gospel of Thomas, as suggested by DeConick.<sup>47</sup> However, this judgment rests upon the highly speculative suggestion that the reconstructed kernel of Thomas has 'close affinities with the Christian traditions associated with Jerusalem'.<sup>48</sup> But if Thomas is not the result of a linear compositional process, the isolation of such a Jewish-Christian kernel cannot be so straightforwardly derived since there may have been any number of different origins and sources for Thomas.

## 2.2. The Evolution of the Oneness Motif (Saying 4)

[λέγει Ἰησοῦς]· οὐκ ἀποκνήσει ἄνθ[ρωπος παλαιὸς ἡμε]ρῶν ἐπερωτῆσε πα[ιδίον ἐπτὰ ἡμε]ρῶν περὶ τοῦ τόπου τῇ[ς ζωῆς, καὶ ζή]σετε· ὅτι πολλοὶ ἔσονται π[ρῶτοι ἔσχατοι καὶ] οἱ ἔσχατοι πρῶτοι, καὶ [εἰς ἓν καταντήσου]σιν.

[Jesus said]: 'A m[an old in da]ys will not hesitate to ask a ch[ild of seven da]ys about the place o[f life, and he will li]ve. For many who are f[irst will be last and] those who are last will be first, and [they will attain unit]y.

ΠΕΧΕ ΙϞ ϞΝΑΧΝΑΥ ΑΝ ΝΔΙ ΠΡΩΜΕ ΝΖΛΛΟ ΖΝ ΝΕϞΖΟΟΥ ΕΧΝΕ ΟΥΚΟΥΕΙ ΝΨΗΡΕ ΨΗΜ  
ΕϞΖΝ ϞΑΨϞ ΝΖΟΟΥ ΕΤΒΕ ΠΤΟΠΟϞ ΜΠΩΝΖ ΔΥΩ ϞΝΔΩΝΖ ΧΕ ΟΥΝ ΖΔΖ ΝΨΟΡΠ ΝΔΡ  
ΖΔΕ ΔΥΩ ΝϞΕΨΩΠΕ ΟΥΔ ΟΥΩΤ

Jesus said, The man old in days will not delay to ask a small child of seven days about the place of life, and he will live. For many who are first will be last and they will become one alone.

---

<sup>46</sup> Whether GHeb or the common tradition between Thomas and GHeb is a pre-Diatessaronic 'harmonizing tradition' tradition, as suggested by Luomanen, is a question which cannot be addressed here fully, but in principle this may be possible. Luomanen, *Recovering Jewish-Christian Sects and Gospels*, 200-32.

<sup>47</sup> DeConick, *Recovering the Original Gospel of Thomas*, 113-55.

<sup>48</sup> DeConick, *Recovering the Original Gospel of Thomas*, 129.

This saying – particularly in its Greek form – pairs together a series of opposites through the compilation of a number of previously unrelated sayings to form a comprehensive statement about salvation and the composition of the community. In a saying possibly alluded to in the writing of Hippolytus,<sup>49</sup> the old man is to seek wisdom from the child about the place of life. This then represents the type of reversal found in the adjoined Mt/Mk/Lk saying concerning the ‘first’ and ‘last’ and may itself be dependent upon one of these texts. Similar to parallel passages in the canonical gospels, age assumes a symbolic meaning. It is both a negative judgment on the ‘first’, represented by the old man, as well as a positive commendation of ‘the last’, the child of seven days. The old man, though he is esteemed in status, is categorized as the ‘last’ who must seek out help from the lowly children who are startlingly categorized as ‘first’. Were the saying to end here, its meaning would suggest the reversal of worldly status by the divine words of warning and approval. Yet the saying has been secondarily expanded and given a new application through the final clause καὶ εἰς ἓν καταντήσουσιν. The reversal of worldly status is modified by this oneness motif to produce a distinctly ecclesial orientation of the saying, indicating the mixed, but egalitarian nature of the Christian community united in its pursuit of life.<sup>50</sup> The initial distinction between ‘first’ and ‘last’ dissolves as both are either elevated or relegated onto a common plane.<sup>51</sup>

At many points, Saying 4 of the Coptic text appears to be a verbatim translation of the Greek text, yet the Coptic tradition omits the final phrase ‘the last will be first’ to disrupt a previous symmetry and further distances the saying from Mt/Mk/Lk.<sup>52</sup> Instead of a scribal error,<sup>53</sup> the tradition attested by the Coptic text was probably deliberately excluded. If the

---

<sup>49</sup> Hippolytus, 5.7.20 ‘Concerning which nature they have explicitly made tradition in the Gospel inscribed according to Thomas, saying thus: “Whoso seeks me shall find me in the children from seven years (upwards). For there in the fourteenth year I who am hidden am made manifest”’. With its mention of children and seven this saying has only a vague connection to the saying found in the Greek and Coptic. It is certainly possible that Hippolytus has misquoted his Gnostic opponent, yet a connection to this saying remains possible and indicates that Saying 4 itself may have assumed a drastically different form than the one attested by P.Oxy.654 and the Coptic text. At the very least, Hippolytus’ quotation reveals one divergent way this passage came to be understood.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Gal. 3.28 or Eph. 4. 13.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Valantasis, commenting on the Greek text, ‘The final phrase “and become one and the same” points toward more than inversion, rather, to a process of collapsing of opposites (such as old and young, first and last) into one. The distinctions ultimately resolve themselves into a state of non-distinction, plurality and opposites are transformed into some sort of unity’. Valantasis, *The Gospel of Thomas*, 35.

<sup>52</sup> Goodacre, *Thomas and the Gospels*, 60-61.

<sup>53</sup> April D. DeConick, *The Original Gospel of Thomas in Translation* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 57; Tim Ricchuiti, ‘Tracking Thomas: A Text-Critical Look at the Transmission of the Gospel of Thomas,’ in *Revisiting the Corruption of the New Testament: Manuscript, Patristic and Apocryphal Evidence*, ed. Daniel B. Wallace (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2011), 206.

Greek envisions a human status which may be positively commended by God ('the first will be last'), for the Coptic there is only the negative judgment on esteemed human status ('the last will be first'), as all must seek that wisdom disclosed precisely in the abandonment of worldly status. The double movement of commendation and judgment is supplanted by a singular movement of complete self-abnegation. Similarly, while the goal of the reversal in the Greek text between old and young, 'first' and 'last', is communal unity, the omission of 'the last will be first' obscures the original balance of the saying and thereby applies the oneness motif towards different ends. No longer is oneness a description of the mixed community of the humbled and exalted, first and last, but instead marks the common unity of those who have forsaken the values of the world. Such a dramatic limiting of the composition of the community may be directly related to the stark exclusivity of the community found elsewhere in the Coptic text, such as Saying 23, in which Jesus says, 'I will choose you one out of 1,000, and two out of 10,000, and they will stand as one alone'. The number of those who are chosen is comparatively few relative to the vast number of possible candidates. As the tradition behind the Coptic text of Thomas understood itself in such exclusive terms, the additional turn toward an encratic monasticism enabled further development of the oneness motif and the equating of 'ΟΥΔ ΟΥΩΤ' with 'ΜΟΝΔΧΟC' (Sayings 16, 49, 75).<sup>54</sup> So within the Coptic tradition there is testimony of a three-fold evolution of the oneness motif stemming from the tradition's modification of Saying 4 and then branching outward into communal exclusivity and finally into monasticism.

Reading Thomas backwards, the saying in its Greek and Coptic forms seems to demonstrate evidence of a multi-stage compositional growth, which brought together the saying of an old man and a child of seven days with the reversal of 'first' and 'last' saying and then later added a final ecclesiological statement concerning the unity of the mixed community. In comparison with the Greek text, it also becomes clear that the Coptic text represents a family of interpretation of this oneness motif, changing through time from a mixed to an exclusive, elitist community. This happened either through re-conceptualization of the community itself, or more likely, as the Thomasine family passed between different communities.

---

<sup>54</sup> April DeConick recognizes that the oneness motif is a late accretion, however she overlooks the ecclesiological overtones of Saying 4, thereby failing to see any shifts of meaning within the oneness motif itself, 'In *Thomas*, the use of the term ΜΟΝΔΧΟC is synonymous with the Coptic phrase ΟΥΔ ΟΥΩΤ, a phrase describing a single person....[i.e.] those who have chosen the encratic lifestyle'. DeConick, *Recovering the Original Gospel of Thomas*, 191.



### 2.3. For and Against a General Resurrection (Saying 5)

Λέγει Ἰη(σοῦ)ς· [γνῶθι τὸ ὄν ἔμπροσ]θεν τῆς ὄψεώς σου, καὶ [τὸ κεκαλυμμένον] ἀπὸ σου ἀποκαλυφ<θ>ήσεται[αί σοι· οὐ γάρ ἐσ]τιν κρυπτὸν ὃ οὐ φανε[ρὸν γενήσεται], καὶ θεθαμμένον ὃ οὐκ ἐγερθήσεται].<sup>55</sup>

Jesus said: ['Know what is in fro]nt of your face and [that which is hidden] from you will be reveale[d to you. For th]ere is [nothing] which is hidden which will not [be made mani]fest and nothing buried which will n[ot be raised]'

ΠΕΧΕ ΙϢ COYWN ΠΕΤΗΠΜΤΟ ΜΠΕΚΖΟ ΕΒΟΛ ΔΥΩ ΠΕΘΗΤ ΕΡΟΚ CΠΝΔΩΛΠ ΕΒΟΛ ΝΔΚ ΜΠ ΛΔΔΥ ΓΔΡ ΕCΖΗΤ ΕCΠΝΔΟΥΩΝΖ ΕΒΟΛ ΔΝ

Jesus said, 'Know what is in the presence of your face and that which is hidden from you will be revealed to you. For nothing hidden will not be made manifest.

Comparing the Greek and the Coptic texts, the beginning of the saying is rendered in nearly exact terms, exhorting the reader to discover what was so readily available. The hidden truth of where to find life is hidden in plain sight and its revelation is certain. From their common agreement, the Greek and Coptic texts diverge in a striking way. The end of Saying 5 in the Coptic text more closely resembles its Mt/Mk/Lk parallels since it lacks the phrase 'nothing that has been buried which will not be raised'. Without the orientation toward the future resurrection of the dead,<sup>56</sup> the Coptic saying now strictly emphasizes the certainty of revelation for the present interpreter of the sayings. By contrast, the Greek text grounds the certainty of revelation in the certainty of the future general resurrection of the dead, a resurrection which finds its basis in Jesus' own rising from the dead.<sup>57</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> The textual reconstruction of this saying is universally agreed upon and is confirmed by an inscription on a burial shroud found in 1953 which reads 'λέγει Ἰησοῦς, οὐκ ἐστὶν τεθαμμένον ὃ οὐκ ἐγερθήσεται'. The saying's parallel with the Gospel of Thomas was first noted by, H.-Ch. Puech, 'Un logion de Jésus sur bandelette funéraire,' *Bulletin de la société Ernest Renan* 3 (1955).

<sup>56</sup> I acknowledge that the mention of resurrection here may have been understood metaphorically by some readers of Thomas, yet the presence of this saying on an Oxyrhynchus burial shroud (see fn. 59 below) and the very literal burial imagery of the saying makes this less likely.

<sup>57</sup> Petr Pokorný, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Thomas: From Interpretations to the Interpreted*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, *Jewish and Christian Texts in Contexts and Related Studies* (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 43.

DeConick persuasively considers this phrase to be a late accretion and instead sides with the Coptic text against the much earlier Greek text. She suggests that, 'since the content does not cohere with other *Thomas* logia and the saying is known in Egypt, it is probable that the Greek represents a late accretion from the text by a scribe'.<sup>58</sup> While it is precisely the coherence of this phrase with the remainder of the Coptic *Thomas* which is at issue here, the earlier witness seems to contain the later form of the saying, given the abrupt shift of imagery from hidden/revealed to buried/raised. The existence of the buried/raised saying on a burial shroud found in Oxyrhynchus with the formulaic beginning 'λέγει Ἰησοῦς' suggests that this saying existed in an independent form, originating in another gospel text.<sup>59</sup> This independent saying was then secondarily integrated into the Thomasine collection.<sup>60</sup> Despite suggestions to the contrary,<sup>61</sup> this is a concrete example of the Thomasine tradition incorporating a new saying into its collection.

The addition of a reference to the general resurrection into the Greek text implies that the Thomasine text represented by P.Oxy.654 was agreeable to the concept of a future resurrection of the body.<sup>62</sup> In this Thomasine tradition, the living Jesus (Ἰη(σοῦ)ς ὁ ζῶν, incipit) can be said to be living because he has been raised from the dead. Conversely, the Coptic tradition developed within settings which were averse to a hope for a bodily resurrection.<sup>63</sup> A comparison between the Coptic and Greek texts reveals two fundamentally

---

<sup>58</sup> DeConick, *The Original Gospel of Thomas in Translation*, 60; Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus*, 21.

<sup>59</sup> Therefore the shroud, despite dating from 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> century, is not a direct dictation to the Gospel of Thomas. Pace Luijendijk, who underestimates the popularity of the λέγει Ἰησοῦς formula within sayings collections like Thomas. She considers the shroud to be a later quotation of Thomas and a sign of Thomas' continued communal use within Oxyrhynchus. AnneMarie Luijendijk, 'Jesus says: "There Is Nothing Buried That Will Not Be Raised". A Late-Antique Shroud with Gospel of Thomas Logion 5 in Context,' *Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum* 15, no. 3 (2011), 395.

<sup>60</sup> By contrast, Ricchuiti sees the Greek text as more original, though his noting of the theological difference between the traditions is still valid, 'we find the altered Coptic addition, which shifts emphasis away from physical resurrection to the more common refrain of *gnosis* and revelation. Indeed, recognizing the theological motivation for such a deletion, it is most likely that P.Oxy.654 preserves the original text of Thomas 5'. Ricchuiti, 'Tracking Thomas: A Text-Critical Look at the Transmission of the Gospel of Thomas,' 208.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Gathercole, who asks, 'if Thomas is as permeable as some comment, why are no sayings added between the Greek fragments and the Coptic version?'. Gathercole, *The Composition of the Gospel of Thomas*, 163.

<sup>62</sup> This observation is perhaps confirmed by other archeological evidence from funerary art in late-antique Oxyrhynchus, which includes depictions of Jesus and his cross. Luijendijk, 'Jesus says: "There Is Nothing Buried That Will Not Be Raised". A Late-Antique Shroud with Gospel of Thomas Logion 5 in Context,' 400-01.

<sup>63</sup> This point holds true to be the case even if Gathercole or Johnson's suggested reconstructions are valid. For Gathercole, the resurrection saying was transposed from the Greek to the Coptic Saying 6, 'and (there is) nothing covered which will remain without being uncovered', now rewritten to omit the reference to the resurrection. Gathercole, *The Gospel of Thomas: Introduction and Commentary*, 221. Conversely, Johnson suggests that the aforementioned Coptic saying was transposed in the Greek text and rewritten to mention the

opposing representations for the Gospel of Thomas on the question of the resurrection. The Coptic Thomas text offers a life which is not found in the future physical resurrection, but found now in the 'repose of the dead' for the one who understands the meaning of the gospel.<sup>64</sup> Death is a mark of those who are still entangled in the world and have failed to truly comprehend. However, the Thomas of P.Oxy.654 stands with its synoptic counterparts in its affirmation of the future resurrection of those who are buried. But while P.Oxy.654 stands much closer to Mt/Mk/Lk in theology, the Coptic text paradoxically stands closer to Mt/Mk/Lk in form, given that Mt/Mk/Lk fail to witness to an extension of the hidden/revealed motif to include death/resurrection.

An assessment of the Coptic text of Thomas and P.Oxy.654 has revealed many small, but significant differences throughout. It is clear that the Greek and Coptic texts belong to the same family tree of textual tradition, yet the variations show how this tradition can be shaped toward sometimes contrary theological positions. Rather than a plurality of scribal errors or dissimilarities originating from the translation of a formalized, stable text from Greek to Coptic, these variations represent an extensive difference of theological beliefs revealing divergent editions of the Thomas text.<sup>65</sup> But in distinction from DeConick's 'rolling corpus' compositional model, it should be noted that the origin of these differences cannot always be explained along predictable lines. While P.Oxy.654 occasionally coheres more readily with the text and theological viewpoint of Mt/Mk/Lk, this is by no means uniform or straightforward. Relative to Mt/Mk/Lk, the Coptic text moves in opposing directions of conformity. On the one hand, Saying 5 demonstrates greater conformity with the other synoptic witnesses, though it lacks their emphasis on the resurrection from the dead. On the other hand, Saying 4 has moved further away from the Mt/Mk/Lk form to only emphasize the negative reversal of first to last. While the origin of these many differences could be accounted for individually,

---

resurrection. Steven R. Johnson, 'The Hidden/Revealed Saying in the Greek and Coptic Versions of Gos. Thom. 5 & 6,' *Novum Testamentum* 44, no. 2 (2002), 183.

<sup>64</sup> 'His disciples said to him, 'When will be the repose of those who are dead? And when will the new come? He said to them that which you look outward for has come, but you do not know it' (Saying 51). See also, Sayings 60, 90, 113. 'For the Thomas community there is no physical resurrection at all. Its desired state of the individual, both in the present and in the future, is one of Repose (*ἀνάπαυσις*) of the soul... Jesus tells the disciples that their *future* expectation is misdirected; the Repose of the dead is a present reality'. Gregory J. Riley, *Resurrection Reconsidered: Thomas and John in Controversy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Ricchuiti, who recognizes the clear theological motivations for several of the alterations between P.Oxy.654 and the Coptic text. Ricchuiti, 'Tracking Thomas: A Text-Critical Look at the Transmission of the Gospel of Thomas,' 210.

together they complicate any attempt to outline a detailed composition history of the Gospel of Thomas.

In conclusion, comparing P.Oxy.654 and the Coptic text shows that there likely could have been several different versions of Thomas within the early church and it is misguided to assume that the 4<sup>th</sup> century Coptic text of Thomas testifies to the only pre-history of Thomas. The family of Thomasine texts testifies to a tradition in motion with a variety of representations over time long before the composition of the Oxyrhynchus papyrus. Saying 4 in particular shows signs of a compositional history, which juxtaposes previously unrelated sayings and adds an interpretive conclusion. Saying 5 in the Greek testifies to the addition of a new saying on the general resurrection, a saying absent in the Coptic text. While there are places in the Greek and Coptic texts where Mt/Mk/Lk influence is possible, the multivalent nature of the Thomasine tradition suggests that this influence has not necessarily occurred at Thomas' creation and could have occurred at any number of different points. Thomas may have drawn from other non-canonical texts, like the Gospel to the Hebrews or the text that contained the buried/raised saying, and still other sayings have no parallels. Whether it is between the Greek and the Coptic texts or beyond the Greek text toward Thomas' origins, what emerges is a fluid 'family tree' compositional history which is highly interactive with its environment and the various texts it encounters.<sup>66</sup> Such indebtedness, independence and innovation between Thomas and Mt/Mk/Lk are precisely what should be expected when comparing synoptic texts.

### 3. Stable, Migrant, and Rewritten Sayings (Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 1)

P.Oxy.1 has been dated anywhere from between 150-300 CE<sup>67</sup> to shortly after 200 CE<sup>68</sup> Comparing it with the Coptic manuscript, differences are found within Saying 27 and Saying 30. The other sayings of P.Oxy.1 (26, 28, 29, 31, 32, 33) are highly fragmentary, but seem indicate a relative degree of stability between the Greek and the Coptic. What portion of the text we do have bears a resemblance to their Greek counterparts, with minor variations. In

---

<sup>66</sup> Such a wide and diverse array of possible sources and influences complicates the precise determination of influence – specifically Mt/Mk/Lk influence via secondary orality. The determination that Thomas is dependent upon Mt/Mk/Lk via secondary orality presumes a high level of popularity for Mt/Mk/Lk and demands that Thomas has not utilized other sources, claims which require a greater degree of certainty than possible.

<sup>67</sup> Bernard P. Grenfell and Arthur S. Hunt, *Logoi Iesou: Sayings of Our Lord from an Early Greek Papyrus Discovered and Edited, with Translation and Commentary* (London: H. Frowde, 1897), 6.

<sup>68</sup> Attridge, 'Appendix: the Greek Fragments,' 97.

Saying 27, the Greek text contains the phrase ‘kingdom of God’, while the Coptic only reads ‘the kingdom’. Otherwise, the Coptic word order, transliteration of the exact Greek words (νηστεύω, κόσμος, σαββατον), and the awkward mimicking of Greek verbal constructions (ⲡⲛⲏϭⲧⲉϥⲉ, ⲉⲓⲣⲉ ⲙⲡⲥⲁⲙⲃⲁⲧⲟⲛ) demonstrate every sign that the Coptic text is a straightforward translation of a Greek text. Within a ‘family tree’ compositional model, if P.Oxy.654 shows how the tradition can be shaped through minor changes to sayings, P.Oxy.1 exhibits similar tendencies while also demonstrating how a saying may be transported within the collection from one context to another. Most interestingly, the lack of variation between the Greek and the Coptic in Saying 26 may demonstrate a conservative preservation of parabolic sayings to pre-date their parallel Mt/Mk/Lk counterparts.

### 3.1. A Sign of Stability (Saying 26)

[ - - - ] καὶ τότε διαβλέψεις ἐκβαλεῖν τὸ κάρφος τὸ ἐν τῷ ὀφθαλμῷ τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ σου.

‘[ . . . ] and then you will see to cast out the speck in the eye of your brother’.

ⲡⲉϭⲉ ⲓϭ ϭⲉ ⲡϭⲏ ⲉⲧⲧⲙ ⲡⲃⲁⲗ ⲙⲡⲉⲕϭⲟⲛ ⲕⲏⲁϥ ⲉⲣⲟϥ ⲡⲥⲟⲉⲓ ⲁⲉ ⲉⲧⲧⲙ ⲡⲉⲕⲃⲁⲗ ⲕⲏⲁϥ  
ⲁⲛ ⲉⲣⲟϥ ϧⲟⲧⲁⲛ ⲉⲕⲱⲁⲛⲛⲟϥϭⲉ ⲙⲡⲥⲟⲉⲓ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϧⲙ ⲡⲉⲕⲃⲁⲗ ⲧⲟⲧⲉ ⲕⲏⲁⲛⲁϥ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ  
ⲉⲛⲟϥϭⲉ ⲙⲡϭⲏ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϧⲙ ⲡⲃⲁⲗ ⲙⲡⲉⲕϭⲟⲛ

Jesus said, ‘You see the speck in the eye of your brother, but the beam in your eye you do not see. When you should cast out the beam in your eye then you will see to cast out the speck in the eye of your brother’.

While the first half of the Greek saying is missing, it is nevertheless important for this study because it is the only Greek saying which might be classified as a parable. Not coincidentally, this saying shows that consistency between the Greek and Coptic is nevertheless possible despite the wide variation found in other sayings. The fragmentary nature of the Greek text should not distract one from noticing the strong correspondence between the Greek and Coptic texts.<sup>69</sup> The word order of the Greek text is duplicated by the Coptic with a near exact one-to-one

---

<sup>69</sup> As it does with Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus*, 29-31.

equivalence. Though the Coptic omits the conjunction καὶ, it replicates the future tense of διαβλέψεις and the infinitive ἐκβαλεῖν, with ΕΒΟΛ corresponding to the prepositional prefix ἔκ. The Coptic also reproduces the Greek loan word τότε in the exact position found in the P.Oxy.1.

The saying contains highly specific, essential imagery which must be retained if the intelligibility of the saying is to be maintained. Within the exposition of this narrative, the smallness of ΠΧΗ ΕΤΖΜ ΠΒΔΛ ΜΠΕΚΟΝ starkly contrasts with the implausibly large ΠΟΘΕΙ ΕΤΖΜ ΠΕΚΒΔΛ. The disproportionate sizes of a speck and beam of wood create the principal conflict of the saying, as the removal of the speck is impossible given the presence of the beam. The resolution to this drama consists quite simply in a change in order: first remove the beam from your own eye and then remove the speck from your brother's eye. The order of the narrative and the symmetry of its imagery requires the saying to be passed down with little alteration, lest the saying itself become nonsensical or lost entirely. Certainly, a saying such as this could be given additional characters, extraneous features may be omitted, or extended to include an expository conclusion (like in Saying 64), yet it remains the case that a saying such as this one is built upon several key pillars which may not be easily removed, lest the integrity of the whole saying collapse.

Two tentative conclusions may be drawn from this saying. The first is that the parabolic form may prove to possess a resistance to dramatic change. A parable may be framed according to a variety of interpretations, yet the internal structure demands that it be relatively impervious to alteration. Secondly, this underscores that a degree of continuity between the Greek and the Coptic texts—and by extension from these texts to even earlier forms of Thomas—is nevertheless possible: stark differences between other sayings in the texts of Thomas do not indicate a wholesale divergence. Returning to the 'family tree' analogy, like dominant genes passed down from generation to generation some sayings will resist the pressure exerted on them by their new hermeneutical contexts. A Thomas text, despite its growth and adaptation between editions, still remains within the Thomasine family of texts. Consequently, it remains possible that either the Greek or the Coptic text may preserve earlier sayings found within an earlier version of Thomas and conclusions drawn on the basis of the Coptic text may be indicative of the tradition on the whole. Parables in particular may retain indispensable intrinsic features which go back to a form of the saying that may be independent of their representation in Mt/Mk/Lk.

Finally, in comparison to parallels in Matthew and Luke, Saying 26 of Thomas may preserve a pre-Mt/Mk/Lk form of the saying. The Matthean/Lukan<sup>70</sup> forms of the saying are slightly longer, with two opening questions ('Why do you see the speck in your brother's eye?', 7.3, 'how can you say to your brother?', 7.4), followed by an accusation of hypocrisy and an exhortation to first remove the plank in one's own eye before removing the speck in the eye of one's brother. By comparison, the Thomasine version lacks the second hypothetical question said directly to the brother. This omission is utilized by Goodacre to illustrate the phenomenon he calls 'the missing middle', whereby a saying in Thomas is derived from Mt/Mk/Lk but excludes the middle of the saying, which produces a 'less coherent, secondary version'.<sup>71</sup> I would argue, instead, that the 'missing' material from the Thomasine form could also be explained by way of a Matthean addition which renders the Matthean form somewhat less coherent than its Thomasine counterpart. For Matthew, the issue is twofold: both the imbalance of sin and the desire to correct one's brother. It is the second question and hypothetical dialogue in 7.4 which expresses the intention of correction necessary to substantiate the condemnation of hypocrisy in 7.5. But these two issues do not easily fit together; Matthew's Jesus first condemns the hearer for both a lack of self-awareness and a desire to correct one's brother, only to then sanction such correction. While this apparent contradiction may be harmonized, it remains that the teaching contains tensions which require synthesizing if they are to be understood. Such tensions within the text reveal a Matthean redactional seam. The charge of hypocrisy is a prominent redactional feature within Matthew, directly relating backwards within the Sermon on the Mount to his unique instructions on piety in chapter 6, where it occurs three separate times, and forwards to chapter 23 in his repeated accusations against the scribes and Pharisees. By comparison, this tension is entirely absent within the Thomasine version, which lacks the second question/hypothetical dialogue and subsequent judgment of hypocrisy. For Thomas, the resolution in the second half precisely mirrors the conditions of the first half, offering a coherent vision on the proper order of correction. The issue is not the desire to correct one's brother, but the imbalance of vice

---

<sup>70</sup> The Lukan form of the saying only slightly expands the form found in Matthew and does not depart significantly from his Matthean source. As such, only the Matthean form of the saying will be discussed here in comparison with Thomas and without reference to the hypothetical Q form of the saying. If one were to assume indebtedness to the hypothetical Q document, it would be Q, not Matthew, which has expanded the form of the saying to introduce the question of hypocrisy. This may have happened when the originally separate sayings of Q 6.39-42 were pulled together to form a cohesive unity concerning the issue of reproof, possibly under the influence of Leviticus 19.17. ὑποκριτής is a rare word in Q and so then within this unit it forms a rhetorical climax. Dale C. Allison, *The Jesus Tradition in Q* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1997), 92-95.

<sup>71</sup> Goodacre, *Thomas and the Gospels*, 117.

represented by the speck and the beam. Once the imbalance is addressed, then the correction can readily occur. Therefore it may be suggested that the form of the saying in Thomas exhibits features which may demonstrate its independence of Mt/Mk/Lk.<sup>72</sup>

The claim here is not that Matthew was directly or indirectly dependent upon or familiar with the Gospel of Thomas. It is likely that Matthew has inherited the speck/beam saying from a sayings collection containing a form of the saying similar, but not the same as, that of Thomas and inserted a supplementary question to introduce the issue of hypocrisy.<sup>73</sup> My argument is more modest, in that for this saying the Thomasine form contained in both P.Oxy.1 and the Coptic text may represent a tradition which exhibits signs of independence from Matthew/Luke and their redactional features. This opens the possibility that some of Thomas' genetic heritage may date back to a time prior to, or at least contemporary with, the composition of Mt/Mk/Lk. As is to be expected within the complex web of synoptic relationships, traditions contained within the four synoptic witnesses may coincidentally overlap without explicit signs of indebtedness.

### 3.2. Forced Migration (Saying 30)

[λέγ]ει [ἰ(ησοῦ)ς· ὅπ]ου ἐὰν ὦσιν [τρ]ε[ῖς], εἰσι]ν ἄθεοι· καὶ [ὁ]π[ου] εἶς] ἐστὶν μόνος, [λέ]γω· ἐγὼ εἰμι μετ' αὐτ[οῦ]. ἔγρι]ρον τὸν λίθο(ν) κάκεῖ εὐρήσεις με· σχίσον τὸ ξύλον κάγω ἐκεῖ εἰμι.

[Jesus sa]id[: 'Whe]rever there are [th]r[ee] (people), t[hey ar]e without god. And [wh]e[re] there is o[ne] alone, I s[ay], I am with hi[m]. Lift up a stone and you will find me, split some wood and there I am'.

---

<sup>72</sup> Goodacre cites Saying 26 and its verbatim quotation of Matthew as evidence of direct literary relationship between Thomas and Matthew, 'Verbatim agreement of the kind seen in texts like Thom. 26 illustrates that there is a direct link between Thomas and the Synoptics'. Goodacre, *Thomas and the Gospels*, 48. The Lukan form of the saying in manuscripts P<sup>75</sup> B W attest to διαβλέψεις τὸ κάρφος while κ A C read διαβλέψεις ἐκβαλεῖν to agree with Thomas. While acknowledging the limitations of his argument, Gathercole suggests that Thomas may be indebted to the later group of Luke texts. I agree that verbatim quotation is a valuable and much-overlooked resource when judging Mt/Mk/Lk dependence. But it is notable here that Thomas' version of the saying, while agreeing verbatim with Matthew and/or Luke, has also neatly avoided what seems to be Matthew's redactional additions to the saying. So at least in this instance, the verbatim agreement between Thomas and some texts of Luke does not wholly account for the more substantive differences between them. Simon Gathercole, 'Luke in the Gospel of Thomas,' *New Testament Studies* 57, no. 01 (2011), 135-36.

<sup>73</sup> For another form of the speck/beam saying, see also b.Arak. 16b. 'If one says, "take the mote from thy eye", he answers, "take the beam from your eye"'.



ΠΕΧΕ ΙϞ ΧΕ ΠΜΑ ΕΥΝ ΨΟΜΤ <ΠΝΟΥΤΕ> ΜΜΑΥ ΖΝ ΝΟΥΤΕ ΝΕ ΠΜΑ ΕΥΝ ΧΝΔΥ Η ΟΥΔ  
ΔΝΟΚ †ΨΟΟΠ ΝΜΜΑϸ

Jesus said, 'Where there are three <gods><sup>74</sup> they are in<sup>75</sup> god, where there are two or one I am with him'.

Saying 77

ΠΕΧΕ ΙϞ ΧΕ ΔΝΟΚ ΠΕ ΠΟΥΘΕΙΝ ΠΔΕΙ ΕΤΖΙΧΩΟΥ ΤΗΡΟΥ ΔΝΟΚ ΠΕ ΠΤΗΡϸ ΝΤΑ  
ΠΤΗΡϸ ΕΙ ΕΒΟΛ ΝΖΗΤ ΔΥΩ ΝΤΑΠΤΗΡϸ ΠΩΖ ΨΑΡΟΕΙ ΠΩΖ ΠΝΟΥΨΕ ΔΝΟΚ †ΜΜΑΥ ϸΙ  
ΜΠΩΝΕ ΕΖΡΑΪ ΔΥΩ ΤΕΤΝΔΖΕ ΕΡΟΕΙ ΜΜΑΥ

Jesus said, 'I am the light, the one which is over all of them. I am everything and everything has come out of me and everything reaches out to me. Split some wood and I am there. Lift up the stone and you will find me there'.

First, a word on the reconstruction of the Greek fragment. The principal issue here is whether the lacuna of the second line of the text should have an alpha privative in the phrase ε[ισί]ν ἄθροι or whether it should read ε[ισί]ν θεοὶ. Along with Attridge<sup>76</sup>, I suggest the former while DeConick and Guillaumont<sup>77</sup> suggest the latter is to be preferred. For DeConick, this reading is chosen since she finds the alternative reading 'they are without god' to be unintelligible and because it conforms to the reading attested by the Coptic text.<sup>78</sup>

---

<sup>74</sup> This prior reference to Gods is most likely a scribal error.

<sup>75</sup> For this translation, the text should read 'ΖΜ ΠΝΟΥΤΕ', and the absence of the definite article before ΝΟΥΤΕ is admittedly problematic. Elsewhere, however, the Coptic uses the construction ΖΝ + noun in Saying 28 (ΖΝ ϸΑΡΨ) to mean 'in the flesh'. In either case, whether this phrase is to be understood as 'they are in God' or 'they are Gods', the main point concerning the difference between the Greek and the Coptic stands. Were the text to be read as 'Where there are three, they are Gods', there would still be antipathy between the collective three people who are gods and the lone individual with Jesus.

<sup>76</sup> Attridge comes to his reconstruction on the basis of a re-examination of the papyrus under ultraviolet light. Harold W. Attridge, 'The Original Text of Gos. Thom., Saying 30,' *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 16 (1979); Attridge, 'Appendix: the Greek Fragments,' 119.

<sup>77</sup> A. Guillaumont et al., *The Gospel According to Thomas: Coptic Text Established and Translated* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1959), 21.

<sup>78</sup> DeConick's reconstruction of the Greek is explicitly influenced by the Coptic text; however there is no textual evidence that such a reading is possible. She clearly recognizes the Θ and to its left notes traces that move from the top-left to the bottom-right and from the bottom left to a 'trace [of ink] in the upper right corner'. This pattern suggests for her that the letter in the lacuna must either be a X or N, rather than an A. However, in the high-resolution images I have seen there is no indication of any ink in the top-right corner to the space to the left of the Θ. Moreover, I cannot identify any vertical strokes necessary to suggest a N. I suspect that DeConick has mistaken the far left of the Θ for the far right of her suggested N. Completing the phrase, the half of a distinct

The intelligibility of my reading will be addressed below, but I also believe there is strong textual evidence to suggest that the Greek should read ε[ισι]ν ἄθροισι.<sup>79</sup> While the left half of the middle stroke of the letter is missing, the Θ is clear and the remaining middle stroke extends to the right, similar to the Θ found in the word ὀφθαλμῶ on the third line of verso. The Α next to the Θ is less obvious, though its distinct shape can still be deduced from the faint markings. The first stroke of the letter begins in the bottom-right with an upward diagonal toward the top-left of the letter, extending above the ascender line and then curving downward. The second stroke of the Α forms a circular shape in the bottom-left of the letter, beginning and ending at the midpoint of the first diagonal stroke. Unlike many of the alphas in P.Oxy.1, which are formed with a single stroke, the Α here is formed with two separate strokes.<sup>80</sup> This results in a more elaborate Α, very similar to the alphas of πτωχεία(ν) in the first visible line of the recto or βασιλείαν at the beginning of line 8 on the verso. Next to the Α there is the bottom half of a vertical line, likely the right side of the Ν in εἰσίν. This is consistent with the first reconstruction offered by Hunt and Grenfell, who tentatively suggest a reading of ἄθροισι<sup>81</sup> and is confirmed by Attridge despite the contrary evidence of the Coptic.

The principal difference between the Coptic text and P.Oxy.1 is found here in Saying 30. There is no need to press behind the Greek or Coptic to an original Semitic version of the saying.<sup>82</sup> Instead, the saying is readily comprehensible in both the reconstructed Greek and Coptic representations. P.Oxy.1 offers the basic numeric contrast between three persons who are without God and the sole individual who finds him or herself in the presence of Jesus. The specific location of these three people is inconsequential, it only matters that the three people are together in close spatial proximity. This contrast between three and one is quite obviously meant as a parody of Matthew 18.20: 'For where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them'. If, for Matthew, the gathering of the Christian community

---

vertical stroke must then form an I for DeConick, leaving an unlikely amount of space for the remaining two letters of εἰσίν before the visible Ε. DeConick, *The Original Gospel of Thomas in Translation*, 136.

<sup>79</sup> In contrast with Eisele, who supports the ε[ισι]ν ἄθροισι reading because of its intelligibility, but finds the textual evidence to be ambivalent. Eisele, *Welcher Thomas?*, 149-54.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Hurtado, who notes the scribe to be 'clear and competent, but workaday and certainly not calligraphic ... a copyist of very limited aesthetic abilities'. Hurtado, 'The Greek Fragments of "The Gospel of Thomas" as Artefacts: Papyrological Observations on P.Oxy.1, P.Oxy.654, and P.Oxy.655,' 22.

<sup>81</sup> 'In 1.24 the remains of the letter before ΕΟΙ are consistent with Θ only, and those of the letter preceding suit Α better than Χ or Λ, which seem to be the only alternatives'. Grenfell and Hunt, *ΛΟΓΟΙ ΙΗΣΟΥ*, 13.

<sup>82</sup> As does Nicholas Perrin, 'NHC II,2 and the Oxyrhynchus Fragments (P.Oxy 1, 654, 655): Overlooked evidence for a Syriac Gospel of Thomas,' *Vigiliae Christianae* 58, no. 2 (2004), 146-48. DeConick similarly seeks an Aramaic solution since she considers the Coptic and Greek form to be 'nonsense'. DeConick, *The Original Gospel of Thomas in Translation*, 137.

constitutes the presence of Jesus, for Thomas such a gathering is not blessed by Jesus' presence, but cursed by his absence (εἰσὶν ἄθεοι).

This contrast between individual and community is then elaborated by Jesus through direct speech to the reader ('Lift up a stone and you will find me, split some wood and there I am'). In a similar way to the Matthean saying 'seek and you will find' (Mt. 7.7), Jesus suggests that he is to be found by the one who looks for him within the chopping of wood or the lifting of a stone. Rather than espousing a form of pantheism or panentheism,<sup>83</sup> the emphasis of the saying is on the necessary act of the lone individual which precedes divine revelation. The imagery of splitting wood seems to have a striking parallel to the Infancy Gospel of Thomas and the young Jesus' healing of a young man splitting wood, which culminates in an exhortation by Jesus to 'Split your wood and remember me'.<sup>84</sup> Regardless of whether the Gospel of Thomas is dependent upon the Infancy Gospel or vice-versa, it seems clear that the common imagery of the stone and the wood indicates the commonplace setting within which Jesus is to be found. Together with the contrast between the lone individual and the gathering of three, the saying as a whole implies that process of finding Jesus must be a solitary endeavor without the hindrance of an interpretive community. This strongly anti-community rhetoric finds a surprising contrast with above the Saying 4 of the Greek P.Oxy.654, which seems to envision a mixed Thomasine community united by a common search for life. This is suggestive of a distance between the Greek texts of P.Oxy.1 and 654 on the value of the Christian community and the role of the individual as it relates to the community.

In its Coptic form, Saying 30 assumes a different form with a more obscure meaning. The saying states: 'Where there are three gods, they are in god. Where there are two or one, I am with him'. Rather than a contrast of number between three people and the individual found in the Greek text, the Coptic seems to contrast Jesus and gods, such that 'A gathering of more than two (divine) members cannot participate in the unity of the true God as represented by (the living) Jesus and mediated by Jesus to human beings (I am with him)'.<sup>85</sup> This contrast between gods and Jesus is mirrored in Saying 100, which states: 'give the things of God to God and that which is mine, give it to me', indicating that this saying was likely absent in complete edition of P.Oxy.1. Such an antipathy toward the term God perhaps also explains the absence of the mention of 'God' in Saying 27.<sup>86</sup> Additionally, between the Greek and Coptic, the

---

<sup>83</sup> Pokorný, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Thomas*, 76.

<sup>84</sup> *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, 10.3.

<sup>85</sup> Pokorný, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Thomas*, 76.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Gathercole, *The Composition of the Gospel of Thomas*, 161.

numeric contrast of three and one is altered to three and one or two, thus losing the original contrast between community and individual.<sup>87</sup> Since the second half of the Greek version of the saying is absent, the saying loses the positive implication that the presence of Jesus is available to those who seek him. It is important to note that the second half of the Greek text, ‘Lift up a stone and you will find me, split some wood and there I am’, has migrated within the Coptic tradition into a very different context. But did Saying 30b/77b move from Saying 30 to Saying 77, or the other way around? The saying intelligibly fits within both its Greek and Coptic settings and it is almost impossible to determine which location represents its more natural or original setting.<sup>88</sup> Saying 30 of P.Oxy.1 demonstrates a great deal of theological coherence and is presented as a seamless whole without any obvious indication that it consists of two separable halves. Similarly, Saying 77 of the Coptic text seems to have been composed according to the connecting word ‘ΠΩΖ’ found in both 77a and 77b.<sup>89</sup> Such ambiguity underscores the creative potential for modifications within the Thomasine tradition, as well as the uncertainty of precise reconstructions of its composition history.

This analysis significantly implies that within the textual tradition of Thomas the content and ordering of its sayings can potentially vary between successive editions of the text. Portions of sayings can also be relocated, giving new expression to the saying as it is juxtaposed with different contexts. Jesus’ sayings are not written into stone, but papyri and each new copy offers the possibility of rearrangements of sayings, expansions, or subtractions to more accurately reflect its usage and interpretation. But the inability to determine the original setting of Saying 30b/77b also indicates that the rationale for the rewriting or dislocation of a saying may not always be obvious. Many of the details of Thomas’ composition history cannot so precisely be deduced from the available information we have. But neither can it be said that

---

<sup>87</sup> Plisch notes this difficulty, but unconvincingly speculates that the Coptic numbering of ‘two or one’ preserves the more original form of the saying, which was then altered by a scribe copying from a damaged *vorlage* and mistakenly assimilating Saying 30 with Matthew 18.20. Uwe-Karsten Plisch, *The Gospel of Thomas: Original Text with Commentary*, trans. G. Schenke Robinson (Freiburg: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2008), 98-99.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. DeConick, *The Original Gospel of Thomas in Translation*, 139.

<sup>89</sup> Incidentally, this may also indicate that catchword associations of sayings could have occurred at the Coptic level, rather than at an original Syriac composition. Such a catchword connection and redistribution within the Coptic text is also likely found in Saying 33. The Greek text is fragmentary in the second half of the saying, however the Coptic contains the strictly Coptic catchword link of ⲙⲁⲗⲁⲕⲉ, which it likely translates for the Greek words οὐς and μὸδιος. This suggests that one or both halves of Saying 33 were either composed or transported to its present location after its translation into Coptic. Given the clear dependence of Saying 33.2 to Luke 11.33, as suggested by Gathercole, it is also possible that the saying was included directly from Luke itself. Gathercole, *The Composition of the Gospel of Thomas*, 195-96.

the Coptic text bears witness to a single form of Thomas, written by a single author in the second century.

In sum, differences between the Greek P.Oxy.1 and Coptic texts of Thomas show how a number of significant features of a 'family tree' compositional model. Saying 26 has passed between Oxyrhynchus and Nag Hammadi with very little variation, establishing the possibility that certain sayings may prove resistant to radical change. This saying may also have originated independently of Mt/Lk. Between the two editions of Thomas, Saying 30 has been drastically rewritten away from the Greek's polemic against the Christian community. Moreover, this radical individualism in Saying 30 of P.Oxy.1 contrasts sharply with the vision of a mixed community of Saying 4 in P.Oxy.654, indicating that P.Oxy.654 and P.Oxy.1 may themselves represent alternate, broadly *concurrent*, recensions of the Thomasine tradition. The stability of Saying 26 shows that stability between editions is possible, while the permeability of Saying 30 demonstrates that the Thomasine family of texts is a tradition that is always in motion with a number of divergent recensions.

#### 4. A Significant Difference and a Dependent Saying (Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 655)

Dating from between 200 and 250 CE,<sup>90</sup> P.Oxy.655 is the most fragmentary of any of the Greek texts of Thomas. Unlike P.Oxy.1 and 654, the text of 655 is the compilation of 8 separate fragments, three of which (*a*, *b*, and *c*) form a single document of two separate columns. This portion of the text contains Sayings 36-39. Of the remaining 5 fragments, only fragment *d* contains any significant surviving text, a small portion of Saying 24, but none of the remaining fragments (*e*, *f*, *g*, *h*, all now lost) are able to be joined to fragments *a*, *b*, *c* or *d*. Of the identifiable portions of P.Oxy.655, only Sayings 36 and 37 contain any extended text. In comparison to the Coptic text, P.Oxy.655 seems to demonstrate the same order of sayings, not including the detached fragment *d* containing Saying 24. But while there is very little Greek text available for comparison, Saying 36 contains a significant portion of text absent in the Coptic to show that a saying can be completely rewritten as the Thomasine family of texts enters into new theological contexts.

---

<sup>90</sup> Attridge, 'Appendix: the Greek Fragments,' 98; Grenfell and Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri: Part IV*, 23.

#### 4.1. Why Should One Not Worry? (Saying 36)

[λέγει ἰ(ησοῦ)ς· μὴ μεριμνᾶτε ἀ]πὸ πρωὶ ἕ[ως ὀψέ, μήτ]ε ἀφ' ἑσπ[έρας ἕως π]ρωὶ, μήτε [τῇ τροφῇ ὑ]μῶν τί φά[γητε, μήτε] τῇ στ[ολῇ ὑμῶν] τί ἐνδύ[ση]σθε. [πολ]λῶ κρεί[σσον] ἔς ἔ[στε] τῶν [κρί]νον, ἅτι[να ο]ὐ ξα[ί]νει οὐδὲ ν[ήθ]ει. μ[ηδ]ὲ ἔν ἔχοντ[ες] ἔ]νδ[υ]μα, τί ἐν[δυεσθε] καὶ ὑμεῖς; τίς ἂν προσθ<εί>η ἐπὶ τὴν εἰλικίαν ὑμῶν; αὐτὸ[ς δ] ὥσπερ ὑμῖν τὸ ἐνδυμα ὑμῶν.

[Jesus said: 'Do not worry f]rom morning u[n]til late, o]r from eve[n]ing until m]orning, or [for y]our [food], what [you should] ea[t, or] for [your] clo[thes], what you should wear. [Mu]ch gr[eat]er a[re you] than the [lil]ies, whi[ch do n]ot c[a]rd or s[pi]n. N[ot] havi[ng] even one [a]rt[i]cle of clothing, how are you to be cl[othed]? Who can add to your length (of life)? He will [g]ive to you your clothing.

ΠΕΧΕ Ιϸ ΜΗΚΙΡΟΟΥΨ ΧΙ(Η) ΖΤΟΟΥΕ ΨΑ ΡΟΥΖΕ ΔΥΩ ΧΙΗ ΖΙΡΟΥΖΕ ΨΑ ΖΤΟΟΥΕ ΧΕ  
ΟΥ ΠΘΕΤΗΔΤΑΔΑΙ ΖΙΩΤ ΤΗΥΤΗ

Jesus said, 'Do not care from morning to evening and from evening to morning about what will put on yourselves'.

Two brief remarks on the textual reconstruction are necessary. The text between lines 10 and 11 is usually constructed to read μ[ηδ]ὲν ἔχοντ[ες] (not having) or καὶ ἐν ἔχοντες (and having one). The first reading originally offered by Attridge<sup>91</sup> underscores that one does not have any clothing, so one cannot clothe oneself. In Attridge's revised, second reading<sup>92</sup> one already has a garment, so the saying hypothetically asks 'what (more) will you put on?'. This somewhat redundantly suggests that the Christian should not worry about clothing because he or she is already clothed. While the first reading makes more sense given the overall context, it is objected that the division of μ[ηδ]- ]ἐν violates the uniform rules governing how a word can be divided from one line to the next, which stipulate that 'the division should be made after a

<sup>91</sup> Attridge, 'Appendix: the Greek Fragments,' 121.

<sup>92</sup> Attridge revised his reconstruction after being notified by Skeat of the line division rules. For a timeline and summary of this shift, see James M. Robinson and Christoph Heil, 'The Lilies of the Field: Saying 36 of the Gospel of Thomas and Secondary Accretions in Q 12.22b–31,' *New Testament Studies* 47, no. 1 (2001).

vowel, except in the case of doubled consonants, where it is made after the first consonant'.<sup>93</sup> And while it is possible that the scribe violates these line division rules, the reading  $\mu[\eta\delta]\epsilon\epsilon\nu\epsilon\chi\omicron\nu\tau[\epsilon\varsigma]$  both coheres with the context and follows the rules for line division. On my reading, one is not able to clothe oneself because he or she does not even have a single piece of clothing to do so. This most closely parallels the logic of the following question, which emphasizes the inability humans to lengthen their life. Though such a reading would make line 10 have a total of sixteen letters, this letter count is still comparable to the total in line 13.

The second textual critical issue for this saying is whether lines 9-10 should read  $\alpha\tau\iota[\nu\alpha\omicron]\psi\epsilon\alpha[\acute{\iota}-]\nu\epsilon\iota$  (which do not wool) or  $\alpha\tau\iota[\nu\alpha\alpha]\psi\epsilon\acute{\alpha}\nu\epsilon\iota$  (which grow). Despite objections by Skeat, the latter reading is not illogical or grammatically improbable, as Eisele shows.<sup>94</sup> Since either reading is possible, the question of which one is preferred depends upon how the reading pairs with the following statement concerning the clothing of humanity. Having already established a  $\mu[\eta\delta]\epsilon\epsilon\nu\epsilon\chi\omicron\nu\tau[\epsilon\varsigma]$  and its negative consequences then the first reading,  $\alpha\tau\iota[\nu\alpha\omicron]\psi\epsilon\alpha[\acute{\iota}-]\nu\epsilon\iota$ , is to be preferred. The saying then symmetrically compares the lilies, which do nothing to clothe him or herself, with more valuable humans, who likewise have nothing to clothe themselves. Yet in both instances, God provides clothing for each.

The Greek form of this saying is concerned with the Christian's inner attitude toward the external concerns of food and clothing. Worry about food or clothing is prohibited for the Christian for a number of assorted, yet intertwined reasons. The saying first compares the certainty of human life with lilies: the naked lilies do not card or spin, nevertheless they are divinely clothed. Humans likewise can be assured that their inherent nakedness will be covered by clothing which God will give. This similarity is further heightened by the obvious contrast of the greater value of humans compared to lilies. By way of a pairing of rhetorical questions, the saying suggests that if humans were to strive to attain the needed provisions of their outward life they would fundamentally be unable to achieve what they seek to secure. Inherent in the questions is a negative statement concerning human freedom as it faces physical death: no matter how hard one might try, one cannot clothe oneself, nor can one's lifespan be lengthened.<sup>95</sup> The provision of clothing or the length of life is ultimately a matter which only God can decide. For the Greek form of the saying, God is the sustainer of the world and the

---

<sup>93</sup> Frederic G. Kenyon, *The Palaeography of Greek Papyri* (London: Clarendon Press, 1899), 31.

<sup>94</sup> Eisele, *Welcher Thomas?*, 173-78; T. C. Skeat, 'The Lilies of the Field,' *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 37 (1938).

<sup>95</sup> In comparison to the Mt/Mk/Lk form of this saying, it appears that Thomas has preserved the original sense of the saying. Here,  $\epsilon\iota\lambda\iota\kappa\acute{\iota}\alpha\nu$  refers not to stature or height, as it does for Mt/Lk and their pairing of  $\epsilon\iota\lambda\iota\kappa\acute{\iota}\alpha$  with  $\pi\eta\chi\upsilon\varsigma$ , but lifespan.

reliable provider of good things to his people, whom he considers more valuable than the lilies. They are not to worry because God himself can be trusted to give what is needed. Also, worrying has no benefit whatsoever, since the length of our life is ultimately out of our hands (τίς ἂν προσθ<εί>ῃ ἐπὶ τὴν εἰλικίαν ὑμῶν). Here the indicative ('he will give you your clothing') establishes the imperative ('do not worry').<sup>96</sup> One must live in absolute dependence upon God, the provider of our worldly needs, and not seek any worldly assurances of provision.

By contrast, the Coptic text has limited the scope of the saying to only clothing and contains only the bare negative injunction not to worry.<sup>97</sup> More importantly, the portrait of God as provider and the accompanying negative verdict on human agency are omitted entirely. Consequently, the exhortation not to worry is not given further justification. If a rationale is to be found it must be extrapolated from the rest of the Coptic text, particularly in its wholesale rejection of outward life and its close association with the world. Food and clothing are basic necessities for daily living and the one who worries about the acquisition of clothing or food sees in them a way of ensuring the continuation of future life beyond the present. As illustrated by the parable of the rich man in Saying 63, a concern for the future will lead only to death because it excludes one from seeking and finding life in the present.

Saying 36 of P.Oxy.655 demonstrates how a saying can be drastically rewritten to promote or accommodate shifts in beliefs as Thomas is copied and spread throughout early Christianity. Saying 36 holds the orthodox view of a God who is intimately involved in his creation as the providential orderer of human affairs and provider of worldly necessities. Somewhere between the Greek and the Coptic there arose a discomfort with the depiction of God as a provider and positive portrayal of God as a sustainer of the world, so the saying was rewritten to reflect the new theological context. How is such a wide disparity between the Greek and Coptic to be accounted for within a theory of Thomas' composition? On its own, a single change between texts does not amount to a compositional procedure which is different from any other ancient text. But seen in light of other differences in P.Oxy.654 and 1, such a

---

<sup>96</sup> Cf. Gathercole, 'The Greek, however, grounds the exhortation against anxiety in divine provision, rather than leaving the reason implicit. The Coptic perhaps assumes a fit with those sayings in *Thomas* which accentuate indifference to external, bodily matters such as diet (GTh 14), money (GTh 95; 100), and family ties (55; 99)'. Gathercole, *The Gospel of Thomas: Introduction and Commentary*, 358.

<sup>97</sup> There is a slight difference concerning their delineation of time. The Greek reads, 'from morning until late nor from evening until morning' ('[ἀπ]ὸ πρωὶ ἕως ὄψε, μήτ[ε] ἀ[φ] ἑσπ[έρας] ἕως π[ρω]ῶ'), using two different terms to refer to the evening. However, the Coptic for evening, ΠΟΥΖΕ, can be used as a translation for either Greek term, thus providing the saying a temporal balance and symmetry. See Crum, *A Coptic Dictionary*, 310.



change between witnesses reflects a broad fluidity within the tradition. For her ‘rolling corpus’ model of composition, DeConick attributes the truncation of Saying 36 to the tension created with the composition of Saying 37 and its exhortation to take off one’s clothing.<sup>98</sup> This attribution is odd since it seems to conflict with her strict timeline of Thomas’ linear composition. If, as DeConick suggests, the composition of Saying 37 is to be dated between 60 and 100 CE,<sup>99</sup> then this implies that well over 100 years passed before this tension was observed by the Thomasine community. Instead, Saying 36 has not been truncated due to the influence of Saying 37, but from larger theological shifts that have occurred within the Coptic text of Thomas to reject the world as a medium of divine action. Such a stark change is best explained according to a ‘family tree’ compositional model, which does not assume a linear, continuous theological development of a single text, but a diverse tradition with multiple representations throughout its long compositional history.

#### 4.2. A Test Case of Dependence upon Mt/Lk (Saying 39)

[Λέγει Ἰησοῦς· οἱ Φαρισαῖοι καὶ οἱ γραμματεῖς] ἔλ[αβον τὰς κλεῖδας] τῆς [γνώσεως].  
αὐτοὶ ἔ]κρυψ[αν αὐτήν. οὐτε] εἰσῆλ[θον, οὐτε τοὺς] εἰσερ[χομένους ἀφῆ]καν [εἰσελθεῖν.  
ὕμεῖς]δὲ γεί[νεσθε φρόνι]μοι ὡ[ς ὄφεις καὶ ἀ]κέραι[οι ὡς περιστέ]ρα[ί].

[Jesus said, ‘The Pharisees and scribes] have ta[ken the keys] of [knowledge. They have]  
hidd[en them. They neither] enter in, [nor] do they p[ermit] [those who] enter in [to enter in].  
But [you] ar[e to be wi]se a[s serpents and b]lamele[ss as dov]e[s].

ΠΕΧΕ Ιϸ ΧΕ ΜΦΑΡΙΣΑΙΟC ΜΗ ΝΓΡΑΜΜΑΤΕΥC ΔΥΧΙ ΝΨΑΨΤ ΝΓΝΩCΙC ΔΥΖΟΠΟΥ  
ΟΥΤΕ ΜΠΟΥΒΩΚ ΕΖΟΥΝ ΔΥΩ ΝΕΤΟΥΨΩ ΕΒΩΚ ΕΖΟΥΝ ΜΠΟΥΚΑΔΥ ΝΤΩΤΗ ΔΕ ΨΩΠΕ  
ΜΦΡΟΝΙΜΟC ΝΘΕ ΝΝΖΟϸ ΔΥΩ ΝΑΚΕΡΑΙΟC ΝΘΕ ΝΝΔΡΟΜΠΕ

Jesus said, ‘The Pharisees and scribes have taken the keys of knowledge and hidden them.  
They do not enter in and those who want to enter in, they do not let them. But you, be wise as  
serpents and blameless as doves.’

<sup>98</sup> ‘Once L. 37 accrued in the Gospel, L. 36 appeared contradictory since it suggested that one’s garment is something to be taken off and renounced. So L. 36 was truncated as we find in the Coptic’. DeConick, *The Original Gospel of Thomas in Translation*, 149.

<sup>99</sup> DeConick, *Recovering the Original Gospel of Thomas*, 98.

While there is no specific reason to doubt the plausibility of Attridge's reconstruction of the Greek text, the highly fragmentary nature of this portion of P.Oxy.655 severely limits the productivity of any thorough comparison between the Greek and Coptic fragments.<sup>100</sup> The only observable difference between the two consists in the Coptic's more coherent description of those who are not permitted to enter, clarifying that these are individuals who do not actually enter, but only that they *want* to enter. Therefore, the significance of this saying for the present study is then not concerned with its potential contribution to similarity/difference of the Greek and the Coptic, but what it may suggest about Thomas' dependence or independence of Mt/Lk.

Thomas 39	Matthew	Luke
<p>[Λέγει Ἰησοῦς· οἱ Φαρισαῖοι καὶ οἱ γραμματεῖς]</p> <p>ἔλ[αβον τὴν κλεῖδα] τῆς γνώσεως.</p> <p>αὐτοὶ ἔ]κρυψ[αν αὐτήν.</p> <p>οὔτε] εἰσῆλ[θον,</p> <p>οὔτε τοὺς] εἰσερχομένους ἀφ᾽[ἡ]καν [εἰσελθεῖν. ὑμεῖς]δὲ</p> <p>γεί[νεσθε φρόνι]μοι ὡς ὄφεις καὶ ἀ]κέρα[ι]οι ὡς περιστε]ρα[ί].</p>	<p>23.13</p> <p>Οὐαὶ δὲ ὑμῖν, γραμματεῖς καὶ Φαρισαῖοι ὑποκριταί,</p> <p>ὅτι κλείετε τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν ἔμπροσθεν τῶν ἀνθρώπων·</p> <p>ὑμεῖς γὰρ οὐκ εἰσέρχεσθε</p> <p>οὐδὲ τοὺς εἰσερχομένους ἀφίετε εἰσελθεῖν.</p> <p>10.16b</p> <p>γίνεσθε οὖν φρόνιμοι ὡς οἱ ὄφεις καὶ ἀκέφαιοι ὡς αἱ περιστεραί</p>	<p>11.52</p> <p>Οὐαὶ ὑμῖν τοῖς νομικοῖς,</p> <p>ὅτι ἤρατε τὴν κλεῖδα τῆς γνώσεως·</p> <p>αὐτοὶ οὐκ εἰσῆλθατε</p> <p>καὶ τοὺς εἰσερχομένους ἐκωλύσατε.</p>

Thomas contains the Matthean οἱ Φαρισαῖοι καὶ οἱ γραμματεῖς while reversing the Matthean order. As noted by Goodacre, the pairing of Pharisees and scribes is a distinctly Matthean redactional feature and its occurrence here could possibly be explained by way of literary dependence, so much so that even Stephen Patterson has recognized the relationship.<sup>101</sup> The Thomasine saying proceeds to the Lukan form τὴν κλεῖδα τῆς γνώσεως,

<sup>100</sup> Gathercole, *The Composition of the Gospel of Thomas*, 107.

<sup>101</sup> Goodacre, *Thomas and the Gospels*, 72; Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus*, 36. By contrast, Helmut Koester considers Thomas' form to be more original and is paralleled by his reconstruction of Q. Helmut Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels: Their History and Development* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1990), 92.

but differs in its verb choice (αἶρω vs. λαμβάνω). Thomas then elaborates that the Pharisees and scribes have hidden these keys of knowledge, an extension of the prior mention of them having taken the keys. However, even this apparent deviation from the Mt/Lk witnesses can be paralleled in the textual tradition of Luke, where several witnesses read ἔκρυψατε instead of ἤρατε (D, Θ, the majority of Old Latin witnesses, and the Sinaitic and Curetonian Syriac witnesses). The unique pairing of these phrases, ‘the keys of knowledge’ and ‘hidden’, within variant forms of Luke may indicate a literary relationship between these texts. For DeConick, the testimony of these various textual witnesses of Luke implausibly suggests the exact opposite: that Thomas is independent and Luke was assimilated to the same Jewish-Christian tradition which lies behind Thomas.<sup>102</sup> In the subsequent indictment of the Pharisees and scribes, the Thomasine saying returns to the language of Matthew/Q almost verbatim οὐδὲ τοὺς εἰσερχομένους ἀφίετε εἰσελθεῖν, differing only in the form of οὐδέ and in tense of ἀφίημι (aorist vs. present). This agreement may again indicate either a literary relationship or a dependence upon similar sources. Finally, Thomas contains the separate Matthean saying found in 10.16b without the definite articles. Patterson suggests that this portion of the saying, ‘is readily explained as an independent use of a common Jewish *mashal*’ since there is no ‘redactional evidence to suggest dependence of Thom 39:3 on Matt 10:16b’.<sup>103</sup> By contrast, Goodacre notes the nine-word verbatim agreement in support of Thomasine dependence upon Matthew.<sup>104</sup> As with the above, verbatim agreement may indicate literary agreement, but it may also suggest dependence upon a common source or tradition.

When examined on the whole, the Thomasine form of the saying seems to alternate between Matthean and Lukan language, while appending a separate, possibly Matthean, saying. It is this complicated web of literary relationships which is the principal difficulty when assessing this saying’s exact indebtedness to Mt/Lk. In Saying 39 and more specifically in the Coptic text there does not appear to be any consistent redactional strategy employed.<sup>105</sup>

When judging Mt/Lk indebtedness, it seems that one must choose between a number of unsatisfactory possibilities. Either Saying 39 of Thomas is:

---

<sup>102</sup> DeConick, *The Original Gospel of Thomas in Translation*, 158.

<sup>103</sup> Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus*, 36.

<sup>104</sup> Goodacre, *Thomas and the Gospels*, 39.

<sup>105</sup> As noted by Patterson, ‘[Many have noted] the several occasions where the Thomas version of a saying seems to reflect the editorial work of one or another of the synoptic evangelists. This could mean that the author of Thomas had copied such sayings from the synoptic text itself. There are indeed several places where this appears to be true. But taken together these instances do not suggest any consistent pattern of borrowing’. Stephen J. Patterson, James M. Robinson, and H.G. Bethge, *The Fifth Gospel: The Gospel of Thomas Comes of Age* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press, 1998), 66-67.

1. Wholly independent of Mt/Lk (Koester and DeConick), ignoring the presence of Matthean redactional features and verbatim quotations of Matthew and Luke.
2. Essentially independent, allowing for minor secondary assimilation to Matthean redactional material (Patterson). Such an approach, however, fails to account for the seemingly unique Lukan phrases 'keys of knowledge' and 'hidden'.
3. Wholly dependent upon Matthew *and* Luke, though it seems unlikely that a single editor would so freely alternate between Luke and Matthew phrases for the composition of a saying.

Such a predicament is best resolved when viewed in light of Thomas' 'family tree' compositional process, since it both accounts for instances of Thomas' indebtedness to Mt/Lk and the resultant indecipherable redactional procedure. On this account, Saying 39a was likely initially either composed either on the basis of Matthew, given the presence of prominent redactional features and verbatim quotation, or it began independent of Mt/Lk and was secondarily redacted in accordance with Matthew's form of the saying. Both possibilities are equally likely and there is no firm means for adjudicating between them. Saying 39 then encountered a Lukan form of the saying (perhaps via secondary orality) and was secondarily re-written on the basis of its features ('keys of knowledge' and 'hidden'). Finally, Saying 39b was secondarily appended, given the conceptual link between 'keys of knowledge' and the injunction to be 'as wise as serpents'. This final saying most likely derived from Matthew and may have been inserted into the present location from within the sayings collection itself. If the redactional procedure of Saying 39 appears to be inconsistent it is so because Thomas has been edited by a number of different redactors operating within different hermeneutical contexts. More interestingly, if the textual instability of DeConick's 'rolling corpus' model is often employed to preserve an initial kernel of independent Mt/Mk/Lk -like material, here this instability actually *supports* the case for Thomas' dependence upon Mt/Mk/Lk, providing a plausible explanation for its apparent redactional inconsistencies. The Gospel of Thomas did not exist in a hermeneutical vacuum, cut off from the rest of early Christianity. Instead, the Thomasine tradition was readily influenced by Mt/Mk/Lk within a common synoptic plane in the interactive diversity of early Christianity.

Rather than relegating Thomas and its 'data' approach to a subordinate class of gospel composition, Thomas' dependence upon Mt/Mk/Lk more closely relates Thomas with those synoptic witnesses and there is no reason to consider Thomas' indebtedness to Mt/Mk/Lk to be of a unique class in comparison to Matthew and Luke's dependence upon Mark. Varying degrees of indebtedness, independence, and innovation are to be expected between any two synoptic texts and therefore Thomas merits such a classification.

Taken as a whole, a comparison between the texts from Nag Hammadi and Oxyrhynchus reveals the many ways the Thomasine family of texts can be revised and shaped as the tradition moves through time into new theological contexts.<sup>106</sup> Between the Coptic text and P.Oxy.654, nearly every one of its sayings have been altered in a textually minor, but theologically significant way. Between P.Oxy.1 and the Coptic text, Saying 26 exhibits a strong degree of durability toward this process of change while portions of Saying 30 have been both rewritten and relocated to another position within the Coptic text. Finally, Saying 36 of P.Oxy.655 shows how a saying may be profoundly edited by the Coptic to render an altogether new meaning. Variations between the Greek and Coptic manuscripts of this magnitude demonstrate how Thomas likely assumed many different forms over time. Saying 39 has been shown to be dependent upon Mt/Lk at several different points in its compositional history. In sum, there is no single text of Thomas, only a family of similar texts which has been edited and re-written to address the immediate needs and concerns arising from their personal or corporate use. If this is true of Thomas between Nag Hammadi and Oxyrhynchus, it is likely that further editing and re-writing of the Thomasine tradition occurred within earlier recensions of Thomas stretching back into the second century and beyond.

## 5. Beyond Oxyrhynchus: the Genre and Title of Thomas Through Time

If Thomasine tradition was not simply the product of a single author at one time, it follows that the text fulfilled a number of different, and possibly competing, purposes throughout its numerous modifications. In its 'final', Coptic form, Thomas purports to be a gospel, cut from the same cloth as other texts which came to be called gospels. For both Thomas and the canonical texts, this gospel genre classification is a secondary attribution having primarily to do

---

<sup>106</sup> Cf. Ricchuiti, "Tracking Thomas: A Text-Critical Look at the Transmission of the Gospel of Thomas," 228.

with their witness to the person of Jesus.<sup>107</sup> This is a genre which the Gospel of Thomas claims for itself: the colophon in the Coptic manuscript of the Gospel of Thomas titles the text:  $\overline{\Pi\Theta\Upsilon\Delta\Gamma\Gamma\Theta\Lambda\text{ION}} \overline{\Pi\text{K}\Delta\text{T}\Delta} \overline{\Theta\text{W}\Delta\text{C}}$ , or ‘The Gospel According to Thomas’.

But there are a number of indications that this title was only retrospectively given by its community as it interacted with other texts that came to be known as gospels.<sup>108</sup> The secondary attribution of the text of Thomas as ‘gospel’ is significant for the present study because, were Thomas to have the title ‘Gospel according to Thomas’ in its original composition, then its composition must be dated well after the composition of Mt/Mk/Lk and the formalization of these texts as gospels. Instead, nowhere within the body of Thomas does the term  $\Theta\Upsilon\Delta\Gamma\Gamma\Theta\Lambda\text{ION}$  ever appear (unlike Mt/Mk/Lk) and the description of this text as a gospel seems to conform to a pattern established by an emerging genre of writings similarly concerned with the person of Jesus. Further, the attribution of the composition of the gospel to the apostle Thomas seems to be secondary.<sup>109</sup> Despite some minor variations, in both its P.Oxy.654 and Coptic forms the introduction to the gospel begins: ‘These are the hidden sayings which the Living Jesus spoke and Judas Thomas [Didymus] wrote’. Saying 1 then begins with the rare introduction, ‘He said’. The consecutive listing of two active subjects followed by a singular pronoun creates a degree of ambiguity into the text as to the identity of the speaker of Saying 1.<sup>110</sup> The scribe of the P.Oxy.654 usually employs a coronis (◀) to differentiate between sayings and the absence of such a coronis between the introduction and Saying 1 indicates that these were to be read together as one unit. If the reference to Thomas were removed, then the sentence would smoothly read: ‘these are the hidden words which the Living Jesus spoke. He says,’ thereby resolving the potential confusion of identity in this section. Therefore it may be hypothesized that the original preface to the text did not contain any reference to Thomas and prior to being designated a gospel, like its fellow synoptic counterparts, the text was originally transmitted anonymously. It is only in conjunction with the text’s formalization as a gospel among other gospels that the attribution to Thomas also was added.

---

<sup>107</sup> By contrast, Richard Burridge excludes Thomas from the classification of ‘gospel’, perhaps indicating that his definition of gospel is more restrictive than its early usage. Richard A. Burridge, *What Are the Gospels?: A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography*, Second ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 242.

<sup>108</sup> Pokorný, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Thomas*, 12.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. Watson, *Gospel Writing: A Canonical Perspective*, 229-32.

<sup>110</sup> Cf. Robinson, who notes that, ‘in the Greek text Jesus’ name and the present tense, used as a historical present, is so predominantly (though not exclusively) used in the quotation formula for Jesus’ sayings that one may even wonder whether the subject of Saying 1 is not found in the nearer antecedent, Thomas’. Robinson and Koester, *Trajectories Through Early Christianity*, 79, n. 24.

### 5.1. The One, Worthy Apostle (Saying 13)

The hypothesis that the Gospel of Thomas began as an anonymous, informal sayings collection is strengthened on examination of Saying 13, the only other saying which directly mentions Thomas by name. In this saying Jesus speaks to his disciples, asking them to compare him to someone else. Simon Peter and Matthew suggest he is a 'righteous angel' and a 'wise philosopher' respectively. Thomas addresses Jesus as teacher and claims that 'my mouth will not bear to speak of who you are like'. The presenting issue at stake is whether Jesus can be compared to pre-existing conceptualities. Simon Peter and Matthew both compare Jesus to categories which are already available to them, while Thomas refuses to answer the question. For this non-answer, Thomas is commended by Jesus, who then takes him aside from the disciples and tells him three secret sayings. Upon returning to the disciples, Thomas refuses to repeat what Jesus has said, because: 'If I should tell you one saying which he spoke to me, then you will pick up stones and will cast them at me and then a fire will come out from the stone and burn you up'. So while the first interest of Saying 13 seems to be the articulation of various Christological confessions and their incomparability to the ineffable Jesus, the saying also introduces a sharp division between Thomas and the disciples. Jesus' initial question to all the disciples is meant to demonstrate the superiority of Thomas, especially in contrast to the failed attempts of Matthew and Simon Peter. If the Mt/Mk/Lk parallels are concerned with a contrast between the disciples' understanding of Jesus and the incomprehension of the crowds, for Thomas this division between insiders and outsiders runs through the disciples themselves.

If the disciples of Peter/Matthew and their particular answers to Jesus' question are representative of the texts which were ascribed to their authorship,<sup>111</sup> then such a divide between disciples extends also to their respective textual witness to his identity. Thomas and his gospel are not one of several apostolic witnesses; rather, he is set apart from them as Jesus' equal and worthy of exclusive teaching, further claiming an exclusive status relative to other gospel texts.<sup>112</sup> Moreover, Thomas' exalted status and separation from the disciples must be maintained. Thomas will not disclose to them his secret teaching because doing so leads to

---

<sup>111</sup> Cf. Watson, 'It seems that the intention is to define the status of the Gospel of Thomas in relation to other known apostolic writings, ascribed to Peter and Matthew'. Francis Watson, 'The Fourfold Gospel,' in *The Cambridge Companion to the Gospels*, ed. Stephen C. Barton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 38.

<sup>112</sup> In itself, this is not a unique claim within the synoptic literature. The author of Luke indicates that he holds his account of the life of Jesus to be more accurately ordered in comparison to other, previous 'attempts' (Lk. 1.1-4).

their destruction. This boundary ensures that the secret teaching which Thomas was given remains his secret to hide and not reveal.<sup>113</sup> Thomas' superior status above the disciples is derived from his possession of a secret teaching of Jesus. If the attribution of the Gospel of Thomas to Thomas occurs on the basis of Saying 13, then it also closely coincides with the secrecy theme. It is especially worth noting Saying 13's isolation of Thomas is itself dependent upon the parallel scene in Matthew 16.13-19. As with Mark and Matthew, Thomas features the same concern for Jesus' true identity and opens with a question on this subject from Jesus directed to his disciples and contains the same progression from false attempts to the one true answer. More importantly, much like the Matthean scene at Caesarea Philippi, the disciple who provides the final, best answer is then further distinguished by Jesus as the recipient of special revelation not seemingly available to the disciples.<sup>114</sup>

When Saying 13 is compared with the rest of the gospel both Thomas' superiority to the other disciples and the secrecy theme are largely incompatible with the emphasis of the text as a whole. Saying 5 exhorts the reader to 'know what is front of your face so that which is hidden from you will be revealed to you'. This outlook is repeated in Saying 6 as the justification for the promise that 'all is brought to light before the truth'. The injunction to seek out and discover what is plainly available to the interpreter is altogether different from the secrecy described in Saying 13. Here, the basis for one's pursuit is upon the certain accessibility of this knowledge to all who seek rather than the secrecy of this knowledge to the many unworthy recipients.<sup>115</sup> The dividing line between the worthy insiders and unworthy outsiders is instead drawn according to one's willingness to seek and find that which is universally available to all. Even more explicitly, the secrecy espoused in Saying 13 is rejected in Sayings 32, 33 and 39. In Saying 32, the city which is built on the top of a high mountain 'cannot be hidden [δύναται οὔτε κρυβῆναι]'. The saying features the combination of two sets of conceptual pairs: a fortified city cannot fall and a city on a hill cannot be hidden. The city may represent the Christian community, but more likely represents the evangelistic activity of the disciples.<sup>116</sup> Missionary proclamation is, by definition, spoken openly within the public sphere and cannot be hidden. Similarly, in Saying 33 what one will hear in their ear, one must:

---

<sup>113</sup> So Gärtner, 'it is clear that in Logion 13b we encounter a concept which was fairly widespread in Gnostic circles, that certain trusted Apostles received teaching of such secrecy that its disclosure would have fatal consequences for the whole world'. Gärtner, *The Theology of the Gospel of Thomas*, 121.

<sup>114</sup> Cf. Gathercole, *The Composition of the Gospel of Thomas*, 177.

<sup>115</sup> See Valantasis, 'The knowledge here does not revolve about secret, or hidden revelations, but rather about immediate perception and understanding that will guide the way to revelation and disclosure'. Valantasis, *The Gospel of Thomas*, 62.

<sup>116</sup> DeConick, *The Original Gospel of Thomas in Translation*, 142.



‘preach it on your rooftops. For no one burns a lamp and put it under a bushel, nor must one put it in a hidden place [2M M& 6Q2HT]’. All teaching must be preached indiscriminately and without reserve. Just as a lamp can only function when displayed, so too can the Christian message only find its proper fulfillment when it is proclaimed, suggesting that the Thomasine family of texts originally functioned within a kerygmatic setting. And while Saying 13 believes that such public proclamation would endanger its hearers to death and destruction, the image of the lamppost providing light to those walking within a house indicates that the public preaching is for the benefit of its recipients. Finally, in Saying 39, the ‘hiding’ of the ‘keys’ which enable one to gain ‘knowledge’ by the Pharisees and scribes is not endorsed by Thomas, but explicitly denied. Knowledge must not be kept for oneself, but openly shared. By hiding his secret teaching from the other disciples, Thomas in Saying 13 acts in the exact opposite manner suggested by Saying 39.

Rather than a ‘paradox in the nature of Thomas’<sup>117</sup> attributable to the dual audiences of the gospel, the differences between openness and secrecy in Saying 13 and the rest of the gospel is paralleled by other redactional and stylistic differences. The singling out of Thomas as superior to the disciples is unparalleled within the gospel. A single disciple is rarely singled out from the rest of the disciples<sup>118</sup> and an individual is never contrasted with other disciples. Instead, the disciples are overwhelmingly categorized and addressed as an indivisible group.<sup>119</sup> They collectively form Jesus’ primary dialogue partner and primarily serve as an ignorant foil in comparison with the wisdom of Jesus’ teaching. These sayings almost all follow the same stylistic format, beginning with a question from the disciples followed by Jesus’ response. In many of these sayings Jesus either answers with a condescending rhetorical question (Saying 18, 72), personal criticism (Saying 43, 51), or direct refutation (Saying 52, 99). In no other instance is an idea from a disciple commended by Jesus as even remotely correct. So not only is it rare that a disciple would be addressed individually, as happens in Saying 13 with Matthew and Peter, but it is also remarkable that Thomas’ suggestion would be applauded by Jesus. In this way it can rightly be said that Saying 13, ‘uses the motif of the disciples’ incomprehension as a foil to elevate one particular disciple, namely Thomas, as a recipient of special revelation’.<sup>120</sup> However, this utilization of a pre-existing motif also indicates that Saying 13 is a

---

<sup>117</sup> Bruce Lincoln, ‘Thomas-Gospel and Thomas-Community: A New Approach to a Familiar Text,’ *Novum Testamentum* 19 (1977), 68.

<sup>118</sup> Exceptions are Sayings 12 (James), 61 (Salome), 21 (Mary), and 114 (Simon Peter and Mary).

<sup>119</sup> These include Sayings 6, 12, 18, 20, 22, 24, 37, 43, 51, 52, 53, 60, 72, 99, 113.

<sup>120</sup> Risto Uro, *Thomas: Seeking the Historical Context of the Gospel of Thomas* (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 91.

later addition to an already existing, written text, rather than an integral part of the collection as a whole.<sup>121</sup>

If Saying 13 is a later addition to Thomas, then a number of conclusions can be drawn regarding the redaction of Thomas through time. First, this shows another instance where the Thomasine tradition was secondarily assimilated to Mt/Mk/Lk. Moreover, the secrecy theme espoused by Saying 13 likewise arose at a later time within Thomas' composition history. The sayings of Thomas were not initially meant to be inscrutable to outsiders and only coherent to the select, initiated few. This may possibly be true of Thomas in 'final form' represented in the Coptic text,<sup>122</sup> however this was not its original purpose. If Thomas is in any way representative of the broader sayings collection genre, then this indicates that secrecy and esoteric teaching are not themselves inherent to sayings collections.<sup>123</sup> Instead, the purpose of a sayings collection is the exact opposite of secrecy: they enable a convenient means to record and possibly distribute the essentials of Jesus' teaching. Finally, the secondary nature of Saying 13 confirms the initial observation that, like the other synoptic texts of Mt/Mk/Lk, the Gospel of Thomas was only later on considered to be a gospel which was secondarily attributed to the apostle Thomas. By showing the secondary nature of Thomas' status as 'gospel', this paradoxically brings Thomas closer to Mt/Mk/Lk. The textual family known as the Gospel of Thomas did not have its origin as a gospel, but as an informal sayings collection. Rather than 'The Gospel of Thomas' a more likely title for the sayings collection, given to the Greek fragments in 1897, could have been Λόγια Ἰησοῦ on the basis of the incipit.<sup>124</sup> This title reflects the basic hermeneutical intentions and genre of the text, namely to collect and preserve a witness to Jesus' teaching. Such a 'data' approach would efficiently utilize space and preserve only what it believes to be those essential words of Jesus.

---

<sup>121</sup> Similarly, though he considers this saying to be independent of Thomas, Patterson understands the references to Thomas and Peter in Sayings 13, 114, and the prologue—Thomas' beginning and end—to be a sign of their secondary nature. Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus*, 117.

<sup>122</sup> Grant and Freeman, commenting on the Incipit of the book: 'Since they are secret words, he would expect most of them to be at least slightly different from what was known publicly. And, since a blessing is given to him "who will find the interpretation of these words," the reader would expect to find many of them mysterious, or at least set in a new context which makes understanding difficult'. Robert M. Grant and David Noel Freedman, *The Secret Sayings of Jesus* (London and Glasgow: Collins Press, 1960), 102.

<sup>123</sup> So Valantasis, 'The fact that these are secret sayings adds some specificity. Their secrecy at once explains the audience and the mode of expression... They are esoteric because they are not written as discursive descriptions or as a philosophical tractate, but as sayings. Sayings demand that the audience puzzle over their meaning, and, therefore only the capable will understand them'. Valantasis, *The Gospel of Thomas*, 31. This is the position advocated by James Robinson, who sees Gnosticism as the 'ultimate outcome' of the sayings collection genre, a genre that 'readily' facilitates the distortion of sayings. Robinson and Koester, *Trajectories Through Early Christianity*, 113.

<sup>124</sup> Grenfell and Hunt, ΛΟΓΟΙ ΙΗΣΟΥ. See also Watson, *Gospel Writing: A Canonical Perspective*, 221-33.

## 6. Conclusion

What would become known as the Gospel of Thomas originally began as one or several lists of Jesus' teachings, gathered together by an anonymous scribe or scribes who wished to preserve and utilize the teachings of Jesus as an aid to personal study, preaching, or teaching. Such a list was put together in the absence of authoritative alternatives. According to its 'data' approach, it eschewed extraneous sayings and narrative features as it sought to preserve only the essential words of Jesus' teachings. Yet this new text did not remain unchanged and very quickly underwent what I call a 'family tree' compositional model. As the text encountered new interpretive horizons through new communal controversies and the interaction with new texts, the sayings collection was edited to suit the changing situations. New sayings were added to supplement the original sayings collection and old sayings were re-written or potentially lost altogether. Other sayings, either because of their widespread popularity or because of the necessary preservation of their internal coherence, resisted such alterations to their form or meaning. The original text proved so useful that it was copied and distributed to other readers and communities. These new texts then gave rise to new opportunities for revision. This process of copying and redaction continued onward through Oxyrhynchus until the last remaining descendent was found in Nag Hammadi. Somewhere along this process the texts of Thomas interacted with what became known as the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, assimilating some of its wording and sayings either in agreement or dissent. While retaining its sayings collection literary form, the previously anonymous sayings collection soon assumed apostolic origin by attributing itself to the apostle Thomas similar to that of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

This venture backwards into Thomas' composition history has shown that the Gospel of Thomas is not a late, parasitic deviation from a prior norm, nor is it independent, privileged access to the historical Jesus. Thomas existed within a complex of relationships between Mt/Mk/Lk; some of its sayings are independent of Mt/Mk/Lk and may be contemporary with these texts, while others sayings are clearly dependent on Mt/Mk/Lk and therefore relatively late. Its independence is not a mark of Thomas' superiority in the same way that its dependence is not a mark of Thomas' inferiority. Instead, Thomas is to be considered a fourth synoptic witness in early Christianity, given its roughly contemporary composition with Mt/Mk/Lk and the expected synoptic characteristics of independence and dependence.

If Thomas is a fourth synoptic witness, this has a number of relevant consequences for the present study. First, it justifies on historical grounds a comparison between the

hermeneutical approaches of Thomas and the gospels of Mt/Mk/Lk since it establishes that both the 'data' and 'mural' approaches to the Jesus tradition were simultaneously operative within early Christianity. If Thomas were not a contemporary of Mt/Mk/Lk, then this text and its 'data' approach may be deemed to be a foreign deviation from early Christianity's otherwise uniform 'mural' hermeneutic. If this were true, a comparison of Thomas and Mt/Mk/Lk would still be possible, but any conclusions made about these texts hermeneutical approaches would lessen their significance for our understanding of early Christian gospel writing. Instead, the production of gospel-like texts was not an unbroken unity originating from Jesus and traveling along a single 'narrative' trajectory culminating in the narrative gospels of Mark, Matthew, Luke, and then John. Consequently, both the 'data' and 'mural' approaches were simultaneously employed by early Christian gospel writers. Rather than being a foreign imposition into the Jesus tradition, Thomas' 'data' approach to the Jesus tradition belongs with Mt/Mk/Lk within a common synoptic plane. It follows that the implementation of a given interpretive approach to the Jesus tradition represents a hermeneutical *choice* on the part of the authors as neither the 'data' nor 'mural' approaches can claim greater historical credibility. This choice for or against narrative entails several subsequent theological and hermeneutical tendencies that are readily reflected in the interpretations of Jesus' parables. Identifying such hermeneutical tendencies will be the subject of future chapters in the thesis as I examine the interpretation of two of Jesus' parables according to the 'data' and 'mural' approaches of the Gospel of Thomas and the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

### **Chapter Three - Mediating the Past of Jesus' Parables: the Parable of the Lost Sheep in Matthew, Thomas, and Luke**

Though the 'final' form of the Gospel of Thomas may have a late dating relative to Mt/Mk/Lk, in both its content and sayings collection literary form the traditions contained within Thomas are roughly contemporary with Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Rather than placing the Gospel of Thomas outside of the conversation with the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke by assigning to it total dependence or independence from these well-known canonical texts, Thomas and its 'data' approach should be seen as belonging with Mt/Mk/Lk as a fourth synoptic witness to the teachings of Jesus. Within this common synoptic plane, Jesus' parables can be understood either according to a 'mural' approach, embedding them within a story of his life or through a 'data', sayings collection context containing only his words. Given the alternate possibilities of hermeneutic represented by Thomas and Mt/Mk/Lk, the transmission of Jesus' parables through either a narrative or sayings context is an interpretive choice on the part of the various authors of the gospels. However persuasive it may have proven to be, a narrative re-telling of the story of Jesus is not an obvious, or given, consequence of the Jesus tradition, nor was it the only interpretive approach possible to the present significance of Jesus' teaching.

Within both 'mural' and 'data' approaches, a hermeneutical pressure is exerted upon the parable by their respective contexts to influence its interpretation, as the internal features of a parable interface with the external context provided by the evangelists. In this way, a parable's context is the means by which the internal world of the parable realizes symbolic meaning, pointing to another reality beyond the original referent of the parable. Without such contextualization, the parable remains dead and enigmatically inaccessible. If the parables of Jesus could naturally have been transmitted according to either a 'mural' or 'data' hermeneutic, the question then becomes what implications that choice has for the understanding of the parables and the appropriation of Jesus' teaching in general. What are the inherent tendencies of one's chosen hermeneutical approach?

The present chapter seeks to compare the 'data' and 'mural' approaches to transmitting Jesus' teaching in order to delineate some implications this context has for the interpretation of the parable of the lost sheep and these gospels' broader hermeneutic of history. In line with their 'mural' hermeneutic, Matthew and Luke locate the meaning of a parable within a past narrative setting, with particular individuals or groups of people intended as the addressees of the parable, while Thomas' 'data' approach coordinates the parable's

meaning with other sayings in the collection which bear linguistic or formal similarities. If a ‘mural’ approach is employed by Matthew and Luke to adjudicate the past and present, they do so in different ways. Both Matthew and Luke anchor the telling of the parable within a narrative which occurs in the past, and therefore their meaning within the story contains this past reference, however Matthew’s *exemplary* hermeneutic tells Jesus’ past story with the goal of its appropriation in the present church, while Luke’s *biographical* hermeneutic of the parable more exclusively locates the meaning of the parable within the historical circumstances of Jesus’ ministry. By contrast, if Matthew and Luke retell Jesus’ teachings within the past and secondarily seek to mediate the past and the present, the transmission of Jesus’ teachings in the Gospel of Thomas exhibits *de-historicizing* tendencies, without any reference to the past, realizing their significance in the present interpreter. Through such a comparison of Matthew, Luke, and Thomas the implications of the ‘mural’ and ‘data’ approaches become readily apparent.

This study of the versions of the parable of the lost sheep found in early gospel writing begins with its occurrence in the Gospel of Matthew, before proceeding to Thomas and then Luke. To those familiar with the traditional paradigm of the spread of the Jesus traditions, this may seem to be an inauspicious place to begin. In the usual account, the parable finds its first inscription in Q, which was then utilized by Matthew and Luke, followed by Thomas’ dependence upon the synoptics. Between these three witnesses, Luke is usually given priority as the version of the parable which most closely approximates to the Q form, and therefore more authentically reflects the teaching of the historical Jesus. Apart from a few passing comments, this chapter will not directly address this tradition-historical debate, but I mention it here because the historical priority of Luke has exerted a great deal of influence on the interpretation of Matthew and Thomas such that it is often presumed that the parable was exclusively told by Jesus in defense of his ministry toward sinners.<sup>1</sup> Luke’s interpretation is either projected upon Matthew and Thomas, or these are understood to be deviations from Lucan purity.<sup>2</sup> In either case, each evangelist’s distinctive shaping of the parable is overlooked

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Snodgrass, ‘*What does the parable teach?*’ The primary function of this parable for Jesus was a defense of his deliberate association with and eating with people known to be sinners. By his reception and eating with such people he demonstrated the presence of the kingdom and the forgiveness available to all’. Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories With Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 108-09.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, the unqualified endorsement of Luke’s correctness against Matthew in Dodd, ‘The Lucan setting is surely so far right, that the parables refer to the extravagant concern (as it seemed to some) which Jesus displayed for the depressed classes of the Jewish community,’ and Jeremias, who suggests that the Gospel of Thomas demonstrates ‘a complete misunderstanding of the parable.’ Dodd, *Parables of the Kingdom*, 120;

in favor of the hypothetical original. Beginning with Matthew will dislocate the Lucan presentation from its privileged position to emphasize the distinctive features of each gospel's interpretation of the parable. The second gospel to be studied will be the Gospel of Thomas. Placing Thomas in between Matthew and Luke will break the strong covalent bond which exists between Matthew and Luke by virtue of their shared canonical status and supposed common dependence upon the hypothetical Q source. In theory, a comparative study such as this one could be ordered in any configuration, but this order has been selected to better reflect the pre-canonical stage of these texts' reception in early Christianity, where each text resides within a common synoptic plane and to upset many modern assumptions about the parable of the lost sheep.

## 1. The Father's Care for 'Little Ones' - Matthew 18.12-14

### 1.1. General Features of the Matthean Parable

In its Matthean form, the parable is introduced with the rhetorical question, 'what do you think?', addressed to his disciples. The parable is then told in the form of an additional question describing the reaction of a man if one of his hundred sheep were to go astray. The man who owns all one hundred is faced with a choice: he either stays with the ninety-nine sheep on the mountain or pursues the one sheep. The question format is utilized to suggest that the supplied answer is obvious: of course the man would leave the ninety-nine sheep on the mountains to go and seek out the one that has strayed.<sup>3</sup> And if he should find it – the conditional clause here indicating that this outcome is far from certain – then the man will rejoice over the one more than the other ninety-nine sheep. There is a clear contrast depicted between categories of sheep: the one sheep that goes astray and the ninety-nine who remain where they should be. The departure of the one and the joyous celebration over its being found create the only substantive differences between the two categories of sheep.

---

Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 134. By contrast, Drury's narrative analysis leads him to suggest that both settings are equally plausible: 'Luke has altered the setting from [Matthew's] ecclesiastical pastoralia to the world at large. This is not a simple sign of historical accuracy, since the setting of the Christian gospel in the historical world as major, obvious and continuous a theological concern of Luke's as the Church was for Matthew.' Drury, *The Parables in the Gospels: History and Allegory*, 140.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Davies and Allison 'The second question is rhetorical and presumes a positive response'. W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, III vols., vol. II, ICC (London: T&T Clark, 1991), 772. For accounts of the burdensome financial costs associated with the loss of a single sheep, see John S. Kloppenborg and Callie Callon, 'The Parable of the Shepherd and the Transformation of Pastoral Discourse,' *Early Christianity* 1, no. 2 (2010), 232-33.

## 1.2. The Perilous Fate of ‘Little Ones’: The Immediate Setting of the Matthean Parable

The parable of the lost sheep in Matthew is contained within a larger discourse where Jesus responds to a previous question concerning the disciples’ comparative status in the kingdom of heaven—who will be the greatest (18.1)? This generates an extended and diverse discussion on the relationships between disciples in the community.<sup>4</sup> Jesus responds to their question by calling a child to them and exhorting the disciples that they should become like a child (γένησθε ὡς τὰ παιδία), an odd statement which is immediately clarified as the humbling of oneself (ταπεινόςω). The ‘child’ Jesus summons is not considered by Matthew to be one of the crowd, but one of the disciples following Jesus.<sup>5</sup> The crowd present in the teaching about the two-drachma tax (17.24) is absent and from 18.1 onwards only the disciples are mentioned as the exclusive audience of Jesus’ teaching. Consequently, the pericope is not concerned with children in general, but specifically with *disciples* of Jesus who share in the characteristics of a child.<sup>6</sup> Age here should not be understood literally, since the exhortation that the fellow disciples become like these παιδία as a necessary precondition to their entry into the kingdom (18.3) suggests that age is understood metaphorically by Matthew.<sup>7</sup> Verse 5 identifies such ‘children’ as those whom the disciples should not reject, but are to be received by the disciples as fellow disciples. This relates backwards to the disciples’ question about who is the greatest. Those who seek the place of honor are in danger of despising those whom they perceive to be beneath them. Though the terminology changes here from παιδία (18.3-5) to μικροί (18.6, 10), these are used interchangeably, as both are modified by a demonstrative pronoun to indicate a common reference to the child whom Jesus has summoned in 18.2.<sup>8</sup> As suggested above, the μικροί of 18.6-7 are identified as believers in Jesus, but they are also in danger of being led astray by temptation into apostasy (σκανδαλίζω). But this is not to suggest that the

---

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Harrington, who sees 18.1-14 and 18.15-35 to be united in this communal orientation. D.J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991), 271.

<sup>5</sup> By contrast, Davies and Allison overlook 18.6 to suggest that this child is not to be classified as a disciple, but someone else with the disciples in the house in Capernaum. Davies and Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 756.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Drury, ‘[The disciples must become like children to enter [the Kingdom of heaven]. By the same token they should treat other “little ones who believe in me” with care. The addition of “in me” to “believe” is Matthew’s work on Mark, making entirely clear that the little ones are Christians.’ Drury, *The Parables in the Gospels: History and Allegory*, 91.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Luz, ‘All Matthean Christians are little ones to the degree that they affirm this insignificance and practice it as humility and love’. Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8-20: A Commentary*, ed. Helmut Koester, trans. James E. Crouch, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 434.

<sup>8</sup> This is further confirmed when examining Matthean redaction of Mark, which omits the exorcist story of Mark 9.38-41 to preserve the unity of the discourse. R.H. Gundry, *Matthew: a Commentary on his Handbook for a Mixed Church Under Persecution* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 361.



‘little ones’ are not culpable for their being led astray: the warnings in 18.8-9 against stumbling (σκανδαλίζω) are seemingly addressed to the little ones themselves.<sup>9</sup> Finally, verse ten suggests that the ‘little ones’ are those who may be considered the object of malice or derision (μὴ καταφρονήσητε ἐνὸς τῶν μικρῶν τούτων) and are cared for by Jesus’ father in heaven. Rather than the suggestion that Matthew does not have in mind a particular group of believers,<sup>10</sup> these various strands may be put together into a semi-coherent portrait: the children, or little ones, are humble, but fallible and tenuous disciples of Jesus. In their humility they are examples to be imitated by all Christians but their impressionability inclines them to be led astray, leading some within the church to despise them.<sup>11</sup>

### 1.3. The Parable of the Lost Disciple

Both Jesus’ summary statement in Matthew 18.14 and the introduction in 18.10 suggest that the disciples must not despise the ‘little ones’ because they are valued and cared for by the Father.<sup>12</sup> This description of ‘little one’ forms the interpretive introduction to the parable of the lost sheep and the parable’s address, ‘τί ὑμῖν δοκεῖ, unmistakably bridges the previous discourse with Jesus’ prior teaching and the immediate narrative context. In this way, the parable both reflects and illuminates Jesus’ previous teaching. The Father’s care for the ‘little

---

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Luz, ‘In vv. 8-9 people are addressed who are in danger of being led into temptation’. Luz, *Matthew 8-20: A Commentary*, 432. Thompson suggests that 18.8-9 maintains the situation described in 18.6-7. On this reading, the ‘foot’ and ‘hand’ mentioned are to be ‘interpreted in harmony with the previous warnings’ against causing one of the ‘little ones’ to fall way. W.G. Thompson, *Matthew’s Advice to a Divided Community* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1970), 116. See also, G.R. Osborne, *Matthew*, ed. C.E. Arnold, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Books, 2010), 675-76. The body of 18.8 then represents the church, comparable to the Pauline body of Christ (1 Cor. 12.12). However, there is no other indication that Matthew has redacted his Markan source toward this particular ecclesial meaning. Matthew has retained the meaning and context of his Markan source, with no significant alterations. In both texts, ‘*hand* is the instrument for the commission of sin, the *foot* is the means of transport to the place of its commission, and the *eye* is the means by which the temptation to commit it enters in’. Joel Marcus, *Mark 8-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 27A, Anchor Bible Commentary (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 697. Additionally, for Matthew σῶμα always represents the individual. The doublet in Mt. 5.29-30 is especially informative, as its warnings are likewise addressed to the individual.

<sup>10</sup> Davies and Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 761-63.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Schnackenburg, ‘Since “these little ones” is followed by “who believe in me”, what is being referred to is a shaken faith. This is the gravest risk for the “little ones”, simple disciples with a childlike faith, whom Jesus also has in mind when he said “immature”’. R. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 137. See also, Thompson, *Matthew’s Advice to a Divided Community*, 163-64.

<sup>12</sup> This verse and its reference to ‘angels in heaven which all see the face of my father in heaven’ has generated vivid speculation about angelology and the possibility of personal guardian angels. The implications of this puzzling phrase cannot be discarded; the emphasis falls, however, on the Father as principal care-giver. For a discussion of angelology, see: Bogdan G. Bucur, ‘Matt 18:10 in early Christology and pneumatology: a contribution to the study of Matthean Wirkungsgeschichte,’ *Novum Testamentum* 49, no. 3 (2007); Erkki Koskenniemi, ‘Forgotten guardians and Matthew 18:10,’ *Tyndale Bulletin* 61, no. 1 (2010).

ones' in 18.10 may be compared to the shepherd's going out to find the one sheep that has strayed.<sup>13</sup> This equates the shepherd with the Father and the sheep with the 'little ones'. The concern is not to portray the provision of the Father for all sinners who are lost, but to articulate the manner in which the Father watches over those *Christian* disciples who have fallen away from the rest of the flock.<sup>14</sup> Leaving the ninety-nine on the mountains and venturing off, the Father relentlessly pursues those who have gone astray and greatly rejoices over their being found. He does not hesitate to seek out the lost sheep, but such an action is deemed to be an obvious consequence of his responsibility to oversee the entire flock. If the parable does not describe the exact nature of the sheep's departure from the flock, the surrounding context suggests that it is to be understood as a falling away into apostasy/sin. Similarly, the ambiguity of agency in the passive verb *πλανηθῆ* is mirrored by a related ambiguity in the exhortations of 18.6/18.7-9. It is inconsequential *how* the disciple has wandered off, whether by their own fault or the coercion of another: what matters is the response of the Father to seek them out and find them.

According to Matthew's exemplary hermeneutic, the parable of the lost sheep is told to illustrate the actions and attitudes of the Father toward the lost 'little ones'. In his concern for these lost individuals, the Father is posited as an ideal leader of his people and the parable's location within a larger discourse between Jesus and the disciples naturally entails a wider application to the disciples. By way of a concluding statement with universal application, 'So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost', the actions of the Father are held to be exemplary for the disciples—both past and present—to imitate.<sup>15</sup> The disciples and future leaders are to be shepherds to the people of God as the Father has shepherded his flock.<sup>16</sup> The Father's concern for the lost sheep/little ones connects more broadly to the prior instructions given to the disciples and the issue of little ones. Rather than despising the 'little ones' (Mt. 18.10), the parable offers the alternative exhortation to seek out these individuals and rejoice when they are restored. And just like the shepherd's much

---

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Schnackenberg, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 175.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Blomberg, 'Perhaps Matthew envisioned a contrast between faithful and apostate members of the church'. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, 219. Gundry, 'the one sheep [represents] somebody in danger of becoming lost through straying (i.e., a professing disciple in danger of apostasy)'. Gundry, *Matthew*, 365.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Luz, 'Matthew relates [the parable of the lost sheep] to the community. Christians should strive under all circumstances to ensure that the flock remains together, and to find lost sheep at all costs'. Ulrich Luz, *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 106.

<sup>16</sup> Given that the immediate addressees of this teaching are the disciples, it seems one-sided to insist that the community instructions of chapter 18 do not have the church leadership in view, as suggested by Luz. Luz, *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew*, 106-07.

greater joy over the one sheep than the ninety-nine who never went astray, the disciples are to exuberantly celebrate the return of those who are lost. Within a 'mural' hermeneutic, such connections between the parable and the context demonstrate the ways in which a parable and its context mutually interpret one another, just as the component scenes of a mural interface with one another toward a common subject matter and/or story.

Yet there are a number of features, both in the parable and in the surrounding context which do not straightforwardly fit together. If children are to be imitated if one is to enter the kingdom of heaven (Mt. 18.3), this positive characteristic is not utilized by the parable. Moreover, there is no immediate indication made by Matthew to relate the parable to the larger narrative of Jesus' mission,<sup>17</sup> despite the obvious resonances with Jesus' own proclamation of his purpose to come for 'the lost sheep of Israel' (Mt. 10.6, 15.24) and its intertextual echoes of the messianic text, Ezekiel 34.<sup>18</sup> This overwhelming narrative theme found throughout the gospel is omitted by Matthew as the parable is not employed toward this Christological or messianic end.<sup>19</sup> The parable is meant to illustrate the will of the Father, rather than a Christological self-declaration of Jesus' purpose and mission, as suggested by N. T. Wright, who says about the Matthean text, 'Jesus tells parables about a shepherd and a lost sheep to explain his own ministry of welcome to outcasts'.<sup>20</sup> Such differences between the

---

<sup>17</sup> Pace Chae, who suggests, 'The picture of shepherd in Jesus' parable of seeking the one lost sheep in Matt 18:10-14 does not seem to be coincidental with his identity as the Shepherd; Jesus is indeed the one who came to seek the lost, inaugurating the time of promised restoration by YHWH the eschatological Shepherd'. Y. S. Chae, *Jesus as the Eschatological Davidic Shepherd: Studies in the Old Testament, Second Temple Judaism, and in the Gospel of Matthew* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 244. See also, Stanley Hauerwas, *Matthew, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2007), 163; Kloppenborg and Callon, 'The Parable of the Shepherd and the Transformation of Pastoral Discourse,' 243.

<sup>18</sup> While Matthew has employed much of the shepherding imagery also found in Ezekiel 34, he does not posit his parable as a reading of the Ezekiel parable and there are a number of key differences between the two: (1) While the Ezekiel parable attributes the straying of the sheep to the exploitative shepherding of Israel's leaders (Ez. 34.1-10), there is no mention in Matthew of any prior shepherds and the reasons for the sheep's departure is not fully elaborated or directly attributed to failed leadership. (2) In the Ezekiel parable the flock of sheep represents the people of Israel (Ez. 34.2) and their restoration; for the Matthean parable the flock is not immediately identified and the sheep who have strayed are equated with disciples whom Jesus calls 'little ones'. (3) For Ezekiel, the sheep have not wandered from the mountain (as in Matthew), but all over the mountain (δισπάρη μου τὰ πρόβατα ἐν παντὶ ὄρει, Ez. 34.6). (4) Ezekiel does not report any numeration of the flock. This movement of the sheep away from the mountain may echo Jeremiah 50.6, but this again further distances the Matthean parable from Ezekiel to indicate that Matthew has only employed common imagery. (5) The Matthean parable, unlike Ezekiel, stresses the greater joy expressed over the one lost sheep than the ninety-nine. (6) Finally, the parable in Ezekiel culminates with the rule of the Davidic shepherd over a restored Israel, while the Matthean parable restricts the parable's application to God's care for the flock (18.10, 14).

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Joel Willits, 'Here the "shepherd" who leaves the ninety-nine and goes after the one seems to be YHWH himself. In this way, the focus is theological rather than Christological or Messianic'. Joel Willits, *Matthew's Messianic Shepherd-King: In Search of 'The Lost Sheep of the House of Israel'* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007), 114.

<sup>20</sup> N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 533.

parable and its context should not be a surprise, and they provide an indication that, despite the congruency between the two, the integrity of the parable has been maintained.

### 1.3.1. Seeking Out the Lost Brother

The parable does not only connect with the prior teaching about ‘little ones’, but also extends into the subsequent interest in the sinful brother. Though language of ‘little ones’ and ‘child’ falls away and what follows in this section is a seemingly unrelated discussion of how it is that the disciples should attempt to restore the transgressor, the imagery of the parable and its concern for the lost one who has gone astray into apostasy/sin is still operative, and it should thus be read not as a new section, but as continuous with the prior teaching. The parable serves as a transition between the disciple’s attitude toward ‘little ones’ and this broader issue of relationships within Christian communities. If the theme of 18.1-10 is the ‘little ones’ and their relationship with the disciples at large, 18.15-35 extends this concern into a distinctly ecclesiological context.<sup>21</sup> But this occurs on the basis of the intervening parable, which introduces the communal context through its mention of the ninety-nine sheep that did not stray. The pairing of the ninety-nine in the flock and one sheep gone astray suggests that the community can only be restored to wholeness when the one has been restored. There is an exemplary parallel between the actions of the shepherd and the acts of the community: just like the shepherd who goes and leaves the flock of ninety-nine to pursue the one lost sheep, if one’s brother has sinned against you, you are to go and convict (ἐλέγχω) him alone in the hope that he might listen to you. As Thompson notes, ‘The concrete imagery in the parable resembles the situation in the community. In the parable, one sheep begins to go astray [πλανηθῆ]. . . . Matthew has emphasized the shepherd’s concern for the one sheep going astray as background for the zeal which a disciple is to show toward a brother who has sinned’.<sup>22</sup> And while the parable does not outline any actions taken by the found sheep—the sheep is simply found and

---

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Overman ‘The order that is developing and being imposed on the life of the Matthean community is clearly reflected in chap. 18. The process and purpose of discipline in chap. 18 have to do with errant or stumbling members and with the community’s response to this problem’. J. Andrew Overman, *Matthew’s Gospel and Formative Judaism: the Social world of the Matthean Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 101. Ulrich Luz notes that this section and its rule of excommunication ‘reflected the actual conditions in the Matthean church’. Luz, *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew*, 105. Finally, see also Bruner’s lively application of the parable toward present-day church practices. Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: The Churchbook, Matthew 13-28* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2004), 217-22.

<sup>22</sup> Thompson, *Matthew’s Advice to a Divided Community*, 187. See also, Schweizer, ‘If God is unwilling to lose a single one of these little ones, someone in the band of his disciples must get up and go after the one going astray’. Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News According to Matthew*, trans. David E. Green (London: SPCK, 1975), 369.

rejoiced over—it is only in 18.25f. where the sheep may be inferred to be a repentant sinner. Similarly, the conditional clause *ἐάν σου ἀκούσῃ* likewise harkens back to the parable's *ἐάν γένηται εὐρεῖν αὐτό*. It is unknown whether the lost brother will return, just as it is uncertain whether the shepherd will find the lost sheep. If this lost disciple does not see his sin, then 18.17-18 outlines how an increasingly public testimony against the individual may spur them to listen, finally culminating in a collective decision by the church to regard them as a Gentile and a tax collector, i.e. they are to be regarded as a lost sheep which has permanently left the flock. The use of the term *ἐκκλησία* in 18.17 seems to be a clear reference to the present day community and its self-designation as the church.<sup>23</sup> Just as the loss of the one sheep makes the flock incomplete, the loss of the one brother likewise renders the church imperfect and it must do everything it can to seek it out. In this way, the agency of the Father illustrated by the parable is only actualized through the agency of the church leaders – whatever they bind on earth will be bound in heaven and whatever they loose on earth will be loosed in heaven (Mt. 18.18).<sup>24</sup>

Given the reference to binding and loosing in 18.18 and its clear reference to Peter's commendation and office as leader of the church in Matthew 16.19,<sup>25</sup> Peter is prompted to speak and rightly asks Jesus about the place of forgiveness within the process of restoring the lost (Mt. 18.21).<sup>26</sup> Jesus hyperbolically responds that Peter is to forgive 'seventy times seven' times and tells another parable to underscore the obligation of his forgiven disciples/leaders to likewise forgive others (Mt. 18.23-35).<sup>27</sup> The question Peter poses 'how often will my brother

---

<sup>23</sup> Merkle notes that caution should be taken to exclude mentions of *ἐκκλησία* from the 'authentic' traditions about Jesus, outlining a plausible argument for the term's wide usage in the first century. This, however, does not exclude the possibility that the term *ἐκκλησία* had specific importance for Matthean ecclesiology. Benjamin L. Merkle, 'The Meaning of 'Ekklesia in Matthew 16:18 and 18:17,' *Bibliotheca Sacra* 167, no. 667 (2010).

<sup>24</sup> Matthew commonly equates human action and divine action, for example, in the abrupt shifts from Jesus' authority to the disciples' mission and then the promise of Jesus' continued presence in Mt. 28.18-20.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Bockmuehl, 'Peter's role consists not only in the uniquely appointed guardianship of the kingdom's keys but also in authoritative "binding" and "loosing" ... Peter, then, assumes in these verses the role of empowered representative, who is entrusted with the care of his master's business—the kingdom of heaven. Matthew's Peter alone is unique among the Twelve as the one on who the Messiah's church is founded'. Though Bockmuehl is careful to also note that, in 18.18, Peter's role is also to be mimicked by the community, implying that his role is, 'both unique and paradigmatic at the same time'. Markus Bockmuehl, *Simon Peter in Scripture and Memory: The New Testament Apostle in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2012), 76.

<sup>26</sup> Far from indicating that, 'Matthew understood these two parts of the discourse as separate and distinct', Peter's question to Jesus holds the discourses on 'disciple' and forgiveness together, since it is provoked by Jesus' prior teaching. Thompson, *Matthew's Advice to a Divided Community*, 207.

<sup>27</sup> This parable likewise embodies Matthew's exemplary hermeneutic of history, as the parable is told in response to Peter's question to Jesus concerning his personal conduct of forgiveness, only to then broaden its implications in the parable's conclusion, 'So also my heavenly Father will do to you, if you do not forgive each of your brothers from your heart' (18.35).

sin against me and I will forgive him?’ relates directly to 18.15, ‘If your brother sins against you’, and the subsequent process of showing the sinner his/her sin.<sup>28</sup> Matthew does not offer a specific outline of how the coextensive demand for forgiveness and the process of what is called ‘church discipline’ are to be reconciled to one another, but setting them side-by-side in response to a shared problem suggests that both are to be practiced simultaneously as part of the single effort to restore the ‘little one’ who has gone astray.<sup>29</sup> The church leaders must expose and forgive, bind and loose (Mt.18.18), the sin of the transgressor in the hope that the one who is lost might see their sin, repent, and return to the fold.

#### 1.4. Community Discipline within the Gospel Narrative

In many ways, the discourse on church leadership in chapter 18 leaps from the pages of Matthew’s gospel into the life of the contemporary Christian community. But this seemingly unmediated address between past and present is dependent upon the discourse’s place within a larger narrative structure.<sup>30</sup> Chapter 18 is the fourth of five blocks of long teaching given by Jesus, each of which ends with the same redactional conclusion, καὶ ἐγένετο ὅτε ἐτέλεσεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς τοὺς λόγους τούτους, and culminates in the final πάντας τοὺς λόγους τούτους.<sup>31</sup> Though these discourses can be distinguished from the temporal progression of the story,<sup>32</sup> they nevertheless are narrative events and show a clear topical progression.<sup>33</sup> The blocks of teaching each have in view the disciples and subsequent community. The first block of teaching, chapters 5-7 commonly known as the Sermon on the Mount, is primarily directed to

---

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Schnackenburg, ‘The question concerning behavior toward the sinful brother or sister is continued with the question of how often one must forgive’. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 179.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Luz, ‘the addition of vv. 21-22 does not negate vv. 15-18; one must, rather, live with the tension between the two texts’. Luz, *Matthew 8-20: A Commentary*, 467.

<sup>30</sup> A point overlooked by Marxsen when he suggests that this ‘book of the history of Jesus Christ’ offers direct, unmediating bearing upon the present, “‘Jesus’ delivered the discourses which are to be made present—and in speaking them to the disciples he has spoken them to the church’. W. Marxsen, *Introduction to the New Testament: An Approach to its Problems*, trans. G Buswell (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1968), 151, 52.

<sup>31</sup> Matthew’s five blocks of teaching were first recognized by Bacon, who proposed that Matthew’s teaching material was compiled into five distinct discourses, mirroring the five books of Torah. While many have taken issue with Bacon’s anti-Torah interpretation, the relation between the discourses and surrounding narrative, and relegation of the passion to an epilogue, his main insight regarding the structure of Matthew has enjoyed widespread acceptance. B.W. Bacon, *Studies in Matthew* (New York City: Henry Holt, 1930). See also Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom* (London: SPCK, 1975), 1-24.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Luz, who notes that the narrative after each teaching begins exactly where it left off prior to the discourse. Luz, *Matthew 8-20: A Commentary*, 228.

<sup>33</sup> For a discussion on the narrative quality of long discourses, see especially Chatman’s comments on soliloquy in: S.B. Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 180. On the places of the discourses within the Matthean narrative, see Kingsbury, *Matthew As Story*, 106.

the disciples, though the crowds are secondarily in view (5.1, 7.28). This section is concerned with community values and ethics, or those norms by which the life of community is organized. The second block of teaching, chapter 10, instructs the community in its mission and wider witness to the world. Chapter 13, the next section containing a collection of parables, is concerned with community differentiation and distinguishes the disciples who understand from the ignorant crowd at large. Jesus divulges to the community the secrets of the kingdom while excluding those on the outside. As shown above, chapter 18 specifically instructs the leadership of the community in the church's regulation. Finally, the eschatological discourse of chapters 24-25 foretells of the future of the community as it awaits the Parousia.

Together, these five blocks of teaching given to the disciples thus form a handbook for the Christian community in its life, mission, differentiation, leadership, and future.<sup>34</sup> These are not strictly meant for use by Jesus' twelve disciples; Jesus commissions the eleven to carry his words beyond the scope of his earthly ministry into all nations until the end of the age (Mt. 28.20).<sup>35</sup> Matthew addresses the present needs of the community precisely through a recollection of the past.<sup>36</sup> Consequently, the implied reader of the gospel in the present stands in between Jesus' commission and its final completion, finding themselves addressed by Jesus directly as his words have been handed down by this apostolic mission.<sup>37</sup> The parable of the lost sheep is interpreted by Matthew in accordance with his exemplary hermeneutic to address both the disciples and the future community, but this occurs within a wider narrative which itself authorizes such a dual orientation through the mandated mediation of Jesus' teaching by each successive generation of disciples. Jesus speaks from the past into the future through the continued testimony of the church.

---

<sup>34</sup> Krister Stendahl, *The School of St. Matthew: And Its Use of the Old Testament* (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1954).

<sup>35</sup> Matthew's gospel thus understands itself as being addressed to the church whose mission is both Jew and Gentile. Cf. Paul Foster, *Community, Law and Mission in Matthew's Gospel*, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament II* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004).

<sup>36</sup> The preservation and continuation of the past 'datum' of Jesus' teaching by way of the narrative is overlooked by Kingsbury when he concludes about chapter 13 that, 'Matthew's use of parabolic speech may be summarized with the sweeping principle that even as Jesus utilized parables to meet the demands of his own situation, so Matthew has adopted the parables of Jesus and utilized them in such a fashion that they should be able to meet the demands of Matthew's own age of the Church'. J.D. Kingsbury, *The Parables of Jesus in Matthew 13: A Study in Redaction-Criticism* (London: SPCK, 1976), 137.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Bauer, 'the existence of these five discourses underscores a major aspect of Jesus' presence with his community throughout history, that of speaking words and instruction and commandment'. David R. Bauer, *Structure of Matthew's Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Decatur: Almond Press, 1989), 133. See also, D.J. Weaver, *Matthew's Missionary Discourse: A Literary Critical Analysis* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 152-53.

### 1.5. Summary

Matthew has placed his parable of the lost sheep into an immediate context concerned with the relationship between disciples and its implications for church leadership. The narrative setting for this parable frames the parable, providing a rich setting which illumines both the parable and its context. The parable functions as a hinge point within the pericope, between the beginning discussion of care for ‘little ones’ and the later teaching about discipline and forgiveness within the church. Within this diverse and comprehensive discourse, the parable more broadly addresses the issue of how the disciples are to relate to each other, and by extension the church’s collective self-governance. This illustrates the complex exemplary hermeneutic of history offered by Matthew in his interpretation of the parable of the lost sheep. The surrounding narrative context of the parable fixes the ‘meaning’ of the parable to the historical context of Jesus’ ministry. The teaching is generated by a question posed to Jesus by his disciples. Jesus responds by making exemplary reference to another anonymous character in close proximity. This narrative context emphasizes the historical nature of Jesus’ teaching and its indispensable location within the past of Jesus’ ministry. The reference to ‘one of these little ones’ in 18.10, 14 is a clear reference to the youth whom Jesus has summoned and the teaching itself is directed to the surrounding disciples and their conduct. Yet the text is not content to remain fixed within the past, as the parable also reaches forward in time toward the Matthean community.<sup>38</sup> The concern of the Father for the ‘little ones’ in the parable is regarded as exemplary not only for the disciples, but for future Christians leaders as a whole. However, this transition from teaching about God’s action to community instruction occurs precisely because of the narrative context of the parable, as the imagery of the parable connects with surrounding ethical teaching. The pericope then proceeds to outline how it is that the present church should pursue the lost individuals of its flock. Thus for Matthew a ‘mural’ hermeneutic has a *twofold function* in its orienting the parable toward both the disciples within Jesus’ ministry and the present day readers of the gospel. Within this exemplary hermeneutic of history, Jesus’ parable is directed toward the horizons of both past and present, mediating between the two through the continued apostolic witness to the world. It is the narrative context as utilized by Matthew that affords this dual orientation of past and

---

<sup>38</sup> These two levels of meaning are noted by Hultgren, though he mistakenly views narrative as only having a past orientation, ‘At the narrative level chapter 18 generally has to do with instructing the disciples. But as a manual for the Christian community of the evangelist, that means that the teachings are directed to the readers as leaders in the Christian community’. A.J. Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 54.



present, imaginatively guiding the reader into the world of Jesus in order that this past figure might speak directly into the present day.

## 2. Jesus' Journey Toward the Reader - Thomas Saying 107

### 2.1. General Features of the Thomasine Parable

Unlike Matthew, the parable does not begin with a hypothetical question. Instead, the Thomasine version of the parable begins as a comparison to the kingdom, and proceeds with a description of a shepherd having a hundred sheep. One of these sheep has gone astray, but, unlike Matthew's 'little ones', Thomas' sheep is the largest of the flock (ΔΟΥΔ ἑξήκοντα καὶ ὀκτώ ἐπὶ ἑκατόν). As with Matthew, the shepherd leaves the ninety-nine to search for the one. Thomas uniquely highlights the trouble (ἡ ἀνάγκη) the shepherd goes to find this one sheep and then records the shepherd's direct speech to the sheep – he loves the one more than the ninety-nine. As with Matthew, this compares the one sheep to the ninety-nine and its greater value over against the ninety-nine. But this is expressed not through the narrator or outside the telling of the parable, but by Jesus within the parable itself.

#### 2.1.1. The Sayings Collection Context of Thomas' Parables

Interpretation of a parable requires a context of some sort if the parable is to realize symbolic significance, as the narrative world of the parable interfaces with its context to point beyond itself. For a 'data' approach, this sayings context may be provided by a number of different means. A given parabolic saying may contain an interpretive conclusion, such as Saying 21. Or it may be juxtaposed with its adjacent sayings, such as Saying 63. However, many of the parables in Thomas cannot be contextualized in such an obvious manner. Thomas only rarely directly divulges the meaning of its parables. And the order of sayings within a sayings collection may sometimes be significant (cf. Sayings 62-66 in Chapter Four), but this is often not the case as neither the saying itself nor the immediate context illuminates the metaphorical meaning of the parable. In such cases it is the larger sayings collection context which dictates the way or ways that a parable can be construed. With a sayings collection, a parable is never an independent, isolated saying, but occurs within a larger body of sayings that provide its own hermeneutical pressures. The task then is to coordinate the seemingly isolated parabolic saying with this larger context, locating places of overlapping language, imagery, and theology. The resultant interpretation of Thomas' parable of the lost sheep may be deemed a *de-historicizing*

hermeneutic which mediates Jesus' teaching without reference to his historical context and is of supreme relevance for the present reader/hearer of the text.

## 2.2. The Immediate Interpretive Context of the Thomasine Parable

Within the Gospel of Thomas, the parable of the lost sheep falls toward the end, as Saying 107 of 114. In two sayings prior to the parable, Jesus asserts that family relations should be dissolved, satirically saying that those who know their mother and father will be called the son of a harlot. Saying 106 contains the phrase 'When you make two one', found elsewhere in Sayings 11, 22, which describes the future revelation of the kingdom and the unification of one's being ('when you make the two, one', Saying 22). This is paired with a saying found in Mt. 21.21 and Mk. 11.22 here expressing the ability of individuals to transcend natural limitations. Comparing these two sayings with the parable of the lost sheep there is little that might hold them together if these were intended to be interpreted with one another.

While sayings prior to the parable of the lost sheep have little in common with one another, from the parable onwards there is an indistinct hidden/found-revealed motif between Sayings 107 and 109. The parable of the lost sheep is found (ΖΕ ΕΡΟΙ) by the shepherd. In Saying 108, those who 'drink', or learn, from the mouth of Jesus will discover the things that are hidden (ΝΕΘΗΠ). Saying 109 features a parable about a treasure hidden (ΕΙΛΗΠ) in a field, whose owner finds the treasure (ΔΙΖΕ ΔΠΕΙΟ) and then lends money at interest to those he wished. The plain economic interpretation of this parable is then corrected in the following Saying 110, which declares that those who become rich by finding (ΔΙΝΕ) the world should renounce the world. Between each of these sayings there is a broad linguistic connection, but it is unlikely this indicates that they were composed as an interpretive unit.<sup>39</sup> For example, if Saying 109 features a positive instance of 'finding', that which is found in Saying 110 must be renounced. Likewise the shepherd in the parable does not find a hidden sheep, but the largest. Instead, these sayings are held together by way of their broad catchword connections. Catchword associations are used frequently throughout Thomas to provide a linguistic structure to what is often a random collage of sayings. They are largely a stylistic way

---

<sup>39</sup> Pace Carrez, who analyzes Sayings 107-109 together as an 'ensemble'. M. Carrez, 'Quelques aspects Christologiques de l'Évangile de Thomas,' in *The Four Gospels 1992: Festschrift Frans Neirynck*, ed. F. van Segbroeck (Leuven: University Press/Peeters, 1992), 2273-74. See also Scott, who argues that Sayings 107-111 form a 'rhetorical unit' with two parables and a companion saying. Scott, *Hear Then the Parable: A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus*, 390-93.

of arranging sayings, with little hermeneutical significance for the individual sayings.<sup>40</sup> So it may be said that the surrounding context of the parable of the lost sheep underscores the parable's emphasis upon 'finding', but it offers no clues as to the metaphorical significance of finding.

### 2.3. Christology or Anthropology?

In the secondary literature on Thomas, interpretations of the parable of the lost sheep fall on either side of a Christological or anthropological fault line.<sup>41</sup> The Christological reading sees the shepherd to be a metaphor for Jesus and his election of the lone, lost sheep who has wandered from the fold. The anthropological reading contends that the shepherd is the Thomasine Christian who forsakes the economic benefits of the ninety-nine to pursue the kingdom. These readings coordinate the parable to different sayings in Thomas as the parable is contextualized within the larger sayings collection.

The Christological reading principally hinges upon the description of the sheep as the largest of the sheep (ΔΟΥΔ ΝΕΗΤΟΥΥ ΩΡΡΜ ΕΠΝΟΔ ΠΕ) and the imagery of the single sheep among many other less worthy sheep.<sup>42</sup> The 'large' sheep among the others recalls the selection of the 'large' fish among the many other small fish in the parable of the fisherman in Saying 8 (ΝΕΡΡΑΙ ΝΕΗΤΟΥΥ ΔΩΕ ΔΥΝΟΔ ΝΤΒΤ).<sup>43</sup> The saying is a parable of election.<sup>44</sup> Out of the

---

<sup>40</sup> The role of catchwords within a sayings collection like Thomas has been explained by DeConick and Patterson to be indicative of an oral model of composition, with catchword links being formed at a preliterate stage and then residually transferred to the text of Thomas. By contrast, Nicholas Perrin has suggested that catchwords were employed by the author of Thomas to structure his text. It is more apt to say that catchwords functioned in both oral and literary contexts. Certainly there is some oral origin for some of Thomas' sayings, but if Saying 30b has been transposed to Saying 77, then this is surely an indication that catchwords were also operative in Thomas at a textual level of its ongoing composition. DeConick, *Recovering the Original Gospel of Thomas*, 48; Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus*, 102; Nicholas Perrin, *Thomas and Tatian: the Relationship Between the Gospel of Thomas and the Diatessaron* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2002), 49-56.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Fieger, *Das Thomasevangelium: Einleitung, Kommentar und Systematik*, 267; Grant and Freedman, *The Secret Sayings of Jesus*, 181. A third option, less plausible than the other two, is that the parable has no single intended meaning. The sayings collection of Thomas would then simply *preserve* the parable of the lost sheep without imposing upon it any particular interpretation. Such a view exhibits a failure of interpretive perseverance. While the parable lacks a definitive conclusion, the parable nevertheless contains features which echo other sayings in the gospel. These sayings thus form the interpretive context within which the parable resides and interacts. In other words, the sayings collection is not an ideologically neutral list of sayings, but it has been preserved and shaped according to its own distinctive theological viewpoint, as seen previously in Chapter Two.

<sup>42</sup> A theological reading on the basis of Ez. 34 and the eschatological gathering of sheep is briefly offered by DeConick, however this reading is presumed to have existed within the early Jewish-Christian Thomasine community and cannot be easily deduced on the basis of the text as we have it now. DeConick, *The Original Gospel of Thomas in Translation*, 286.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Pokorný, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Thomas*, 149. Other uses within Thomas of ΝΟΔ which may be significant are the parables of Saying 20 (the mustard seed) and 96 (the leaven and dough). Like the parable of the lost sheep, both parables are introduced as kingdom parables. These each narrate the growth of

many small fish, the fisherman chose (ΔQCΩΤΠ) the large fish (ΜΠΝΟΔ ΝΤΒΤ) and discards the remaining smaller fish. This strongly resembles Jesus' choice (†ΝΔΘΕΤΠ) of the lone individual out of a thousand and ten thousand in Saying 23.<sup>45</sup> The choice of Jesus is an act of election, for the chosen ones are those who will find the kingdom (Saying 49). Coordinating this imagery with the parable of the lost sheep, the leaving of the many, ninety-nine sheep to pursue the single, lost sheep mirrors both Sayings 8 and 23. In this, Jesus acts to save the lone individual who has wandered from the Christian community. Unlike the Matthean parable's positive vision of church discipline, it is precisely through their separation from the flock of the church that they are found by Jesus, a point with strong resonances with Saying 30's anti-ecclesial polemic.<sup>46</sup> Such a division between the living and the dead is established by Jesus' salvific journey to those have wandered. Additionally, this is not an inscrutable salvation without a logical basis. The sheep that is found by Jesus is the largest, most desirable, in comparison with the rest of the flock. Those who are saved and will live are those who are inherently worthy of election (Saying 62).

---

something small (seed/dough) into a large (ΝΟΔ) item of the same material (tree/larger dough). If the parable of the lost sheep is to be set against these other parables, this would favor an anthropological reading; the large (ΝΟΔ) sheep that has wandered would be equivalent to the kingdom, to be found by the seeker. However, a key difference between the two is that, unlike Sayings 20 and 96, the large size of the sheep is not something acquired by the sheep, but belongs to it as an inherent characteristic.

<sup>44</sup> Wilson, *Studies in the Gospel of Thomas*, 40.

<sup>45</sup> Liebenberg considers this parable to be a parable of wisdom, 'It is a parody of a view of wisdom as something extraordinary, something leading to extraordinary behaviour and which causes someone (like a fisherman for example) to relate differently towards his environment than other fishermen'. But what Liebenberg considers to be a parody might instead suggest that viewing this parable as a parable of wisdom is mistaken in the first place. This is particularly evident in his suggestion that the parable employs irony so that the wisdom of the parable, 'is not to be confused with a pursuit of wisdom which leads to a radical break with the "real world"'. This view is entirely incompatible with the tenor of the gospel as a whole, which regularly speaks of the world in negative terms, only to contrast the Christian with the world (for example, see Sayings 21, 27, 28, 56, 80, 110, 111). Jacobus Liebenberg, 'To Know How to Find. To Find Without Knowing: Wisdom in the Gospel of Thomas,' *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 59, no. 1 (2003), 108, 09.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Pokorný, '[The large sheep that strays] may allegorically represent the spiritually initiated member of the community who has decided to leave the mainstream church and restore his/her personality by embracing the integral life of the "solitary ones"'. See also, Montefiore/Turner, Gärtner, and Schnider, who impose a Gnostic interpretation upon the parable similar to the *Gospel of Truth* (31-32). This approach explicitly relates the ninety-nine with the 'left hand' and the single sheep with the 'right hand' and its cosmological implications. These overtones are not found in the Thomasine text and it is better to find an interpretive solution within Thomas before seeking additional contextualization with other texts. Gärtner, *The Theology of the Gospel of Thomas*, 234-36. Moreover, the left hand-right hand interpretation of the parable is not itself necessarily Gnostic, since it is cited positively by the 'orthodox' Epiphanius the Latin, who wrote, 'Therefore, beloved, the hundredth sheep is the congregation of the nations—but only those who believed and served the Lord in the same way Abraham did, so that they merit to be placed on the right side... To those who will be on the left, the Lord will say, "Depart from me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire"'. Found in, M. Simonetti, ed., *Matthew 14-28*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 75. Pokorný, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Thomas*, 149; R. Schnider, 'Das Gleichnis vom verlorenen Schaf und seine Redaktoren: ein intertextueller Vergleich,' *Kairos* 19 (1977); Turner and Montefiore, *Thomas and the Evangelists*, 59.

This reading of the parable is not without its difficulties and a number of objections against it may be made. The parable of the lost sheep does not use the language of choice/election, but of finding. Moreover, there are a couple of key differences between the parable of the fisherman and the parable of the lost sheep. If the choice of the large fish in Saying 8 occurs ‘without trouble [ΧΩΡΙΣ ΖΙCΕ]’, the finding of the one lost sheep has happened specifically ‘*after* trouble [ΝΤΑΡΕCΖΙCΕ]’. In the former instance the choice of Jesus is effortless, but the latter seems to indicate the exact opposite. And while the fisherman discards the remaining small sheep, the fate of the ninety-nine who are left is not reported. In response, each of these potential issues with the Christological interpretation is less significant upon closer examination. It may be said that the discarding of the smaller fish is strongly implied by the shepherd’s leaving (ΔCΚΩ) of the ninety-nine, much like the disciples’ own ‘leaving’ (ΔΤΕΤΝΚΩ) of Jesus in Saying 52. More significantly, while the imagery of Saying 8 resonates with that of the parable of the lost sheep, they do not describe the same event. If the parable of the fisherman is a parable of election, the parable of the lost sheep is a parable of salvation, narrating the double movement of seeker and Jesus. This accounts for both the difference of language and the effort exerted by the parable’s protagonist. The ease of choice of the fisherman underscores the overwhelming difference between fish. By contrast, the difficulty of finding the lost sheep mirrors the movement of Jesus toward the saved.<sup>47</sup>

If the Christological reading of the parable depends primarily upon similar imagery within Thomas, the anthropological reading coordinates the language of the parable with the same language used elsewhere within Thomas. The shepherd is depicted as one who seeks (ΔCΨΙΝΕ) the lost sheep until he finds it (ΨΑΝΤΕCΖΕ ΕΡΟC). This is the same verbal construction used in Saying 2, which exhorts the seeker to not stop seeking until he finds (ΜΝΤΡΕCΛΟ ΝΔΙ ΠΕΤΨΙΝΕ ΕCΨΙΝΕ ΨΑΝΤΕCΔΙΝΕ). More broadly within Thomas, seeking as a verb is only ever attributed to the actions of the interpreter. Saying 60 exhorts the disciples to ‘Seek [ΤΗΥΤΝ ΨΙΝΕ] after the place of repose, lest you become a corpse’. Sayings 92 and 94 each report that those who seek (ΨΙΝΕ) will find (ΔΙΝΕ).<sup>48</sup> Similarly, the Gospel of Thomas features a number of instances of misguided, or false, seeking. The intoxicated individuals in Saying 28 ‘seek [ΕΥΨΙΝΕ] also that they come out from the world empty’ and those who wait

---

<sup>47</sup> A comparison could be made here to something like an incarnation espoused in Saying 18. But a more apt comparison might be to the way the movement of Jesus and/or the kingdom makes itself available, reveals itself, or comes toward the interpreter (cf. Sayings 5, 6, 20, 37, 41, 51, 62, 77, 96, 108).

<sup>48</sup> Comparisons between the parable and these sayings are made by Fieger, who concludes ‘Die Erkenntnis des eigenen Lichtanteiles bedeutet dem Gnostiker mehr als alle “Freuden”, die die Welt hervorbringt’. Fieger, *Das Thomasevangelium: Einleitung, Kommentar und Systematik*, 267.

too long to seek will not find (Sayings 38, 59). Other instances of seeking are more neutral, but they nevertheless refer not to Jesus, but to the actions of the Christian (Sayings 18, 24). The verb  $\omega\iota\eta\epsilon$  is never used elsewhere in Thomas for the actions of Jesus, but for the Christian's seeking of knowledge.<sup>49</sup> It is exclusively used to report the activity of those who wish to find life and avoid death and its occurrence in the parable of the lost sheep may indicate that the shepherd who seeks is to be similarly understood as the Christian who exclusively seeks and finds wisdom<sup>50</sup> or oneself.<sup>51</sup> Additionally, Saying 107's use of  $\gamma\iota\omega\epsilon$  is somewhat similar to that of Saying 58, 'Blessed is the man who has been troubled [ $\bar{\eta}\tau\alpha\gamma\gamma\iota\omega\epsilon$ ] and found [ $\alpha\chi\gamma\epsilon$ ] life'. The usage is not quite the same— $\gamma\iota\omega\epsilon$  in Saying 107 illustrate the taxing nature of the search before the ultimate goal of finding while the  $\gamma\iota\omega\epsilon$  of Saying 58 seems to be the overall state of the individual prior to finding life—but the order of 'trouble' to 'finding' remains the same in both. For the anthropological reading, this would then mirror the effort exerted by the Christian to find knowledge and the laborious process of learning.<sup>52</sup>

A parallel for the anthropological reading may also be made to Saying 76 and the parable of the merchant.<sup>53</sup> In this parable, a merchant finds ( $\alpha\chi\gamma\epsilon$ ) a pearl and sells all his merchandise in order to buy the pearl. The saying ends with the conclusion: 'You also, seek [ $\tau\eta\gamma\tau\bar{\eta}\omega\iota\eta\epsilon$ ] after the [or his] enduring treasure that does not perish, where no moth comes near to eat or worm destroys'. The actions of the wise ( $\sigma\alpha\beta\epsilon$ ) merchant are held as an example to be followed, forsaking worldly wealth to pursue a wisdom which is not subject to the inevitable worldly decay. The two parables share a pairing of seek/find, an individual who finds, and a contrast between the thing found and other discarded items. This highlights the economic dimension of the shepherd's leaving of the ninety-nine. The Christian endeavoring

---

<sup>49</sup> On the prominence and significance of the 'seeking' and 'finding' motif in Thomas, see Ron Cameron, 'Mythmaking and Intertextuality in Early Christianity,' in *Reimagining Christian Origins: A Colloquium Honoring Burton L. Mack*, ed. Elizabeth A. Castelli and Hal Taussig (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996).

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Patterson, for whom, 'the shepherd's action is exemplary: it demonstrates his willingness to pursue that one thing which he values most highly, even though it may appear as foolish when measured against the normal standards of the workday world'. Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus*, 144. See also Plisch, *The Gospel of Thomas: Original Text with Commentary*, 232.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Ménard, 'Ce qui était perdu et maintenant retrouvé est le "moi" intérieur que rappelled Heracleon Fr. 23'. Jacques-É. Ménard, *L'Évangile selon Thomas* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975), 206.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Kloppenborg and Callon, for whom the parable is 'simply a metaphor for an elite quest for knowledge'. Kloppenborg and Callon, 'The Parable of the Shepherd and the Transformation of Pastoral Discourse,' 259.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Gathercole, who links the parable of the lost sheep with *both* the parable of the fisherman (Saying 8) and the parable of the pearl (Saying 76) given their structural similarities. While I think such an anthropological reading of the parable to be unlikely, given the differences between the parable of the lost sheep and the parable of the pearl, the anthropological reading nevertheless attests to a *de-historicizing* tendency in the interpretation of the parable of the lost sheep, since the reader would still be encouraged to envision him or herself as the shepherd. Gathercole, *The Gospel of Thomas: Introduction and Commentary*, 584-88.

to find life must first forsake worldly wealth. The greater love of the one sheep than the ninety-nine is then a statement of the greater desire for life compared to the worldly riches.

The strong resonance between the parable and Thomas' programmatic language of seeking and finding is compelling, and it remains possible that some readers of Thomas might have understood the parable in this way. But the appeal to the parable of the merchant, however similar they may be, also reveals a significant difference between the two that I believe convincingly tip the balance toward a Christological reading. The narrative worlds of the parables have fundamentally different inciting incidents, leading to equally different climactic resolutions. The pearl is originally located where it has always been, lying dormant until its finding. The finding of the pearl is then a discovery of a novel item, whose existence was previously unknown by the merchant. In its undiscovered state, the pearl assumes no risk or threat and while its discovery enhances the life of the merchant, it has no effect on the pearl itself. Accordingly, the pearl that is found is the timeless and unchanging wisdom of Jesus' teaching. It is *not* so with the parable of the sheep, where the sheep originally resides with the flock and secondarily wanders away. The finding of the sheep is then the restoration and perfection of the sheep's prior familiarity with the shepherd. These differences between the parables are best accounted for on the Christological reading of the parable. Like a single Christian residing among the whole of mainstream Christianity, the sheep originally belongs to the church and by wandering from the fold this most worthy sheep is found by Jesus to enjoy a more profound relationship which retrospectively calls into question the value of the shepherd's relationship to the ninety-nine.

The parable of the lost sheep is then a parable of salvation, but according to its 'data' hermeneutic it becomes clear that Thomas' interpretation of the parable exhibits de-historicizing tendencies. The teaching is not addressed to any particular individual or group nor is the identity of the sheep explicitly correlated to any past figure. The shepherd seeks after the sheep who has wandered from the fold of the church, and having found this sheep declares that he loves it more than the rest. Because of its 'data' approach, the identity of the lost sheep is not given any particular historical setting: it instead represents the generic Thomasine Christian who has wandered from the fold of the church and is now found by Jesus, their shepherd.<sup>54</sup> The sheep is the Thomasine Christian who, though he is similar to the rest of the sheep, is larger and therefore more worthy of Jesus' favor. This validates the superiority of the

---

<sup>54</sup> Consequently, it cannot be the case that the lost sheep represents lost Israel, as proposed by Petersen. William L. Petersen, 'The Parable of the Lost Sheep in the Gospel of Thomas and the Synoptics,' *Novum Testamentum* 23, no. 2 (1981).

Thomasine seeker relative to the unenlightened mainstream, knowing that Jesus loves him or her more than the rest. It also authorizes the separatist stance of the Thomasine Christian and further encourages him or her to persevere and find life. According to this de-historicizing interpretation, the reader of the text is free, if not required, to understand him or herself as the worthy, lost sheep who is saved by Jesus. Here the distance between the original speech of Jesus, the narrative world of the parable and the real world of the reader speaker are all collapsed into a single encounter between the living Jesus and his beloved. The circumstances of the unique historical utterance are eclipsed by the concerns of the present reader.

#### 2.4. The Same (Contemporary) Ends, But Different Means – Matthew and Thomas

In its concern for the address of Jesus' parable to the present, there is an obvious similarity between Thomas and Matthew. Both form and interpret their parables with an eye toward their direct application in their contemporary contexts, whether that be the elite Christian of Thomas or the church discipline of Matthew. In both instances Jesus' words are regarded by the evangelists as speaking into the present day. But this broad hermeneutical similarity also underscores their key differences.<sup>55</sup> The teachings of Jesus in Matthew have been transmitted from Jesus to the disciples and the Christian community as the message of Jesus is propagated 'until the close of the age' (Mt. 28.20). The words of Jesus are continually reanimated in the church with each successive generation. The text of Matthew then both embodies and promotes this process of re-appropriation, *standing within the very narrative world it espouses*. Therefore for Matthew the narrative, 'mural' hermeneutic simultaneously records/preserves the original datum of Jesus' teaching and ensures its contemporary recollection and interpretation. By contrast, the text of Thomas claims that Jesus' teachings have been transmitted directly from Jesus to Thomas, to the text, without any positive valuation of the mediating role of tradition. The living Jesus spoke and Judas Thomas writes; Thomas is not a mediator or witness, but a scribe with no creative role in the text's composition. This appeal to apostolic authorship in Thomas (similar to John), while having an apologetic function for the authenticity of its contents, also reduces the temporal distance from datum to inscription,

---

<sup>55</sup> In addition to their hermeneutical differences, it is also worth noting that Matthew and Thomas offer two incommensurate understandings of the identity of the lost sheep. While Thomas' large sheep is the superior Thomasine seeker, Matthew's sheep is a 'little one' who has fallen away and in need of rescue. Consequently the Thomas' shepherd seeks only those sheep who are worthy, while Matthew's shepherd seeks those unworthy sheep who are not seeking to be found.



suggesting a greater immediacy of the teaching to the contemporary situation.<sup>56</sup> This immediacy is well illustrated by the change in verb tense found in the Greek fragments. While the *incipit* records that Jesus spoke (ἐλάλησεν), the subsequent sayings read ‘Jesus says [λέγει ἡ(σοῦ)]’.<sup>57</sup> The *incipit* preserves the sayings past referent, only to lose this past orientation in the record of the sayings themselves as the original setting gives way to the redundant list of Jesus’ words.<sup>58</sup> Thomas is then a cipher for the reader’s bare encounter with the very voice of Jesus. The immediacy between Jesus and reader who submits him or herself to his speech-act is more fundamentally the product of Thomas’ ‘data’ approach. Within the sayings collection context of Thomas, the voice of Jesus presents itself in a *de-historicizing* fashion. The datum of Jesus’ parable of the lost sheep and its inscription are now one and the same thing, addressed to the reader who understands.

So while the net effect of Matthew and Thomas’ interpretation of the parable of the lost sheep shares many common features, they do so through vastly divergent means, reflecting the differences of hermeneutical approach taken to the Jesus tradition. Turning to Luke, we find yet another method for mediating Jesus’ parable of the lost sheep. While he shares with Matthew a ‘mural’ approach, he has utilized this narrative in a unique way, choosing to emphasize a narrative’s inherent orientation to the past as the *locus* of Jesus’ ministry. Jesus taught in Galilee during the reign of Caesar Augustus and the meaning of his words remains bound to this space/time in accordance with Luke’s biographical hermeneutic.

---

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Gathercole, ‘The function of Thomas here is to guarantee the authenticity of these “words”’: his modest role as the mere scribe does not detract from this. To define him as a scribe (rather than, e.g. a ἐρμηνευτής like Mark in Papias) is to guarantee a pure and uncontaminated voice of Jesus. The effect of this, together with the form of the rest of *Thomas*, is to create an immediate relationship between Jesus and the reader’. Gathercole, *The Gospel of Thomas: Introduction and Commentary*, 194.

<sup>57</sup> Consequently, this orientation toward the present away from the past cannot strictly be said to be the product of the later Coptic tradition of Thomas. In contrast to the Greek text, the *incipit* of the Coptic text of Thomas reads ⲉⲛⲧⲁ ⲓⲥ ⲉⲧⲟⲛⲓ ⲭⲟⲟϥ, the relative of the first perfect, to maintain the Greek *incipit*’s past orientation. While the sayings of the Coptic text all employ the verb ⲡⲉⲗⲉ commonly singles direct discourse in the past (as suggested by Layton), rather than present tense ⲭⲱ. This is a potentially significant difference between the texts, however it remains the case that, despite this loss in translation between Greek and Coptic, the Coptic nevertheless demonstrates a hermeneutical disposition toward the present reader. This stance is potentially inherited by its Greek antecedent. For more on this difference, see Eisele, *Welcher Thomas?*, 64-66. Bentley Layton, *A Coptic Grammar: with Chrestomathy and Glossary, Sahidic Dialect*, 3rd, Revised ed. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2011), 302.

<sup>58</sup> So while Gathercole is right to suggest that, grammatically, the aorist introduction followed by the present tense-form still preserves a past orientation, in the reading of Thomas the sheer volume of serialized sayings obscures this past orientation. Gathercole, *The Gospel of Thomas: Introduction and Commentary*, 201-03. This point is also made by Robinson: Robinson and Koester, *Trajectories Through Early Christianity*, 79, n. 24.

### 3. The Parable of the Lost Tax Collectors-Sinners - Luke 15.3-7

If Matthew employs an *exemplary* hermeneutic in his utilization of the narrative context of the parable of the lost sheep, Luke employs his narrative toward a *biographical* hermeneutic of the Jesus tradition.<sup>59</sup> Luke tells the story of Jesus' ministry, but unlike Matthew's exemplary hermeneutic his primary purpose is to tell the history of Jesus and of how the church and its kerygma originated out of this history. Accordingly, Luke places his parable within a quartet of parables in response to a challenge posed to Jesus by the Pharisees and scribes concerning his eating with tax collectors and sinners. This is one of a series of controversy dialogues between Jesus and the Jewish leaders on the same topic which form the backdrop for the parables of Luke 15. Luke's biographical hermeneutic of the parable of the lost sheep confines the meaning of Jesus' parable of the lost sheep to this interpretive context, and does not straightforwardly traverse beyond the past narrative setting into Luke's contemporary situation.

#### 3.1. General Features of the Lucan Parable

In its Lucan form, like in the Matthean parallel, the parable is introduced in the form of a question that describes the actions of a man who owns a hundred sheep and seeks after the one sheep who is lost. The ninety-nine are not said to be located on the mountains, as in Matthew, but the wilderness (ἐρημος). Like Thomas, but unlike Matthew, the Lucan parable expresses certainty that the sheep will be found by the man. Drawing upon a wealth of Old Testament shepherding imagery,<sup>60</sup> the parable vividly describes a shepherd who leaves his flock to pursue

---

<sup>59</sup> The use of the term 'biographical' is meant to express Luke's consistent preservation of the past-ness of Jesus' teaching within his narrative and reflects its commonplace usage as a sub-genre of the field of historical study, rather than a specific designation of the text's genre in comparison with Graeco-Roman βίοι, as outlined by Richard Burridge. He lists several generic features of the βίος genre and the authorial intention of writing, including encomiastic, exemplary, informative, entertainment value, to preserve memory, didactic, and apologetic and polemic. Burridge believes that, 'the clearest intentions [of the gospels] seem to involve didactic and apologetic purposes'. As will be shown below, the apologetic and informative purpose of writing is well-suited for Luke, while the didactic possibilities of Jesus' teaching are not always utilized. Burridge, *What Are the Gospels?: A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography*, 210.

<sup>60</sup> Because the parable of the lost sheep resides within a common tradition which portrays the God/human relationship in shepherding terms, it may have broad agreement with Psalm 119.176, and its comparison of sin with the plight of a lost sheep, or the Old Testament's promise to restore the scattered flock (Jer. 23.3-6 // Jer. 50.6 // Ez. 34.15-16). Likewise, the future failure of the Jewish leaders to seek the lost sheep of Israel may resemble the failures outlined in Jeremiah 23.1-2/Ezekiel 34.6: the sheep are scattered and there is none to search for them. However, the variety of Old Testament texts which describe the relationship of God and Israel in shepherd/sheep terms prevents a direct correspondence between the parable of the lost sheep and these Old Testament antecedents. The imagery of the texts resonates with the parable, yet it cannot be said that the parable invokes these texts as a reading of them or a fulfillment of their prior promises of national restoration

the one lost sheep. A great deal of emphasis is put upon the effort of the shepherd to find the lost sheep: he relentlessly searches *until* he finds it (ἕως εὕρη). Like Matthew, the man rejoices upon finding the lost sheep, but Luke then provides much more detail concerning the actions of the man who upon finding the sheep, places the sheep on his shoulders and carries it to ensure its safe return home. The man is then said to call his friends together and asks them to share in his joy over having found a lost sheep. This repeated emphasis on joy clearly forms the central theme of the parable, a point further underscored by Jesus' concluding interpretive summary relating the lost sheep to sinners who repent and the ninety-nine sheep to righteous people who have no need of repentance. As in Matthew and Thomas, there is more joy over the one sheep than there is the ninety-nine, but for both Thomas and Matthew this comparative statement between ninety-nine and one is said within the parable itself by the man, rather than the Lucan placement outside of the parable by Jesus.

### 3.2. Grumbling Houseguests: The Immediate Setting of the Lukan Parable

The parable of the lost sheep occurs at the very beginning of a new narrative scene, shifting from Jesus' teaching to the crowd about the costs of discipleship (Lk. 14.25-35) to a more intimate gathering of tax collectors-sinners,<sup>61</sup> and Pharisees-scribes. This setting occasions the subsequent parables and therefore their primary interpretive context. Between 15.3 and 15.32, Jesus offers teaching to the Pharisees-scribes concerning his relationship to the tax collectors-sinners. Jesus is said by the Pharisees-scribes to be receiving and eating with tax collectors-sinners and the Jewish opponents respond by complaining aloud about their dissatisfaction with Jesus' chosen companions. Jesus responds to them by telling a series of parables which speak to the issue of Jesus' ministry to tax collectors-sinners. Jesus' teaching is exclusively directed to the Pharisees-scribes and concerns their and his relation to such people. It should be noted that from the shift of scene at 15.1 the disciples' presence is not announced by the narrator until 16.1, when they are explicitly included (ἔλεγεν δὲ καὶ πρὸς τοὺς μαθητάς). This restricts the meaning of the first three parables by excluding the disciples from being addressed by Jesus' teaching. Like children at their parents' dinner party, the disciples only

---

from exile, as claimed by Bailey. Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jacob & the Prodigal: How Jesus Retold Israel's Story* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003). On Psalm 119 and the parable, see Westermann, *The Parables of Jesus: In the Light of the Old Testament*, 135.

<sup>61</sup> The accusation of 'sinners' by the Pharisees-scribes identifies Jesus' companions as a variety of notorious individuals beyond the strict occupation of tax collection, such as the woman in Luke 7.39. The disassociation of themselves from this category of guilt is itself a sign of their sinfulness and need of repentance.

overhear Jesus' conversation and it is not suggested that Jesus' words are for their immediate benefit.

### 3.3. Jesus' Defense of his Dinner Companions

Against the accusation leveled by the Pharisees-scribes in 15.2, 'this man receives sinners and eats with them', Jesus tells a series of parables, the first of which is the parable of the lost sheep. Having already defended his association and ministry to tax collectors-sinners in 5.31-32 and 7.41-47, Jesus now approaches the issues with a different tactic, employing a series of parables aimed directly at the scornful response of the Pharisees-scribes. The parable begins in the form of a question, τίς ἀνθρώπος ἐξ ὑμῶν, posed directly to the Pharisees-scribes. Like Matthew, the question form suggests that the actions of the shepherd are meant to be obvious to anyone familiar with the accepted conventions of shepherding. A lost sheep tends to die without the protection of a shepherd; you never find packs of wild sheep roaming the countryside. But more broadly, the question format is a rhetorical tactic employed by Luke at several points throughout the narrative to draw in the addressees of Jesus' teaching.<sup>62</sup> This is especially true of Luke for several of Jesus' other parabolic teaching, which likewise begin with a question to draw the addressees into the narrative world of the parable.<sup>63</sup> In such instances, the conclusion reveals the metaphoric meaning of the parable. The parable of the lost sheep concludes with, 'There will be more joy in heaven over one repentant sinner than over the ninety-nine righteous persons who have no need of repentance' (Lk. 15.7). The sheep that is found by the shepherd is said to be a repentant sinner, while the other ninety-nine sheep are those who have no need of repentance. While this does not itself overtly divulge the identity of the shepherd, it however may be inferred: the lost sheep represents the lost sinners of 15.1 who have gathered to hear Jesus, their shepherd.

If the immediate setting leads one to suspect that Jesus is the shepherd of the parable, the wider narrative contexts confirms this hypothesis. When Jesus went to Levi the tax collector to call him to discipleship, and then declares such actions to be constitutive of his

---

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Carroll, 'There the rhetorical form serves the aim of persuasion: it seeks to elicit the critical listener's identification with the dilemma of the parabolic character and assent to his chosen action'. J.T. Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 310. See also, J.B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 574.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Luke 11.5-10, 11.11-13, 14.5, 14.28-33, and 17.7-10.

mission: he has come to call sinners to repentance (Lk. 5.32).<sup>64</sup> Similarly, Jesus' declaration to Zacchaeus in 19.10, 'For the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost [τὸ ἀπολωλός]' resembles the shepherd who went out and found the sheep which was lost (τὸ ἀπολωλός, 15.6). In his declaration to give away half of his possessions and repay those he has cheated fourfold, Zacchaeus represents the ideal repentant sinner of 15.7. Additionally, the celebration anticipated within the parable also recalls the life-setting of Jesus' ministry. The joy expressed by Zacchaeus as he receives Jesus echoes the joy of the shepherd and his neighbors at the repentance of the sinner.<sup>65</sup> The shepherd calls together (συγκαλέω) his friends, a word which suggests the preparation of a feast,<sup>66</sup> a scene which prominently features in each of Jesus' interactions with tax collectors-sinners. Finally, the ninety-nine sheep that 'have no need of repentance [οὐ χρείαν ἔχουσιν μετανοίας]' closely matches Jesus' own statement in 5.32, 'The healthy have no need of a doctor [οὐ χρείαν ἔχουσιν οἱ ὑγιαίνοντες ἰατροῦ]'. In every instance Jesus' actions toward lost tax collectors-sinners perfectly exemplify the ideal shepherd described in the parable he tells in defense of his actions.<sup>67</sup> According to Luke's 'mural' approach, the narrative world of the parable and Jesus' own ministry of eating mirror and mutually interpret one another. Jesus regularly attends a celebratory feast over the repentance of sinners such as Levi and Zacchaeus, much like the shepherd who entertains his neighbors to celebrate with him over the return of the lost sheep.

It follows that the shepherd of the parable *cannot* be equated with God the Father,<sup>68</sup> as suggested by Jeremias, 'Such is the character of God; it is his good pleasure that the lost should be redeemed, because they are his; their wanderings have caused him pain, and he rejoices over their return home. It is the "redemptive joy" of God, of which Jesus speaks, the joy in

---

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Goulder, 'the ninety-nine who "did not wander"', are similarly brought into real life as "Righteous who have no need of repentance". Luke's eye is back on Levi's home'. Michael D. Goulder, *Luke: A New Paradigm*, vol. II, JSNT Supplement Series (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 606.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Fernando Mendez-Moratalla, *The Paradigm of Conversion in Luke* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 166-67. Pace Ravens, who argues that the absence of repentance language precludes Zacchaeus from being an example of repentance. This, however, overlooks the vivid description of his joy and its clear echoes of 15.7, 15.10, 15.32, et al. D. A. S. Ravens, 'Zacchaeus: The Final Part of a Lucan Triptych?', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 13, no. 41 (1991).

<sup>66</sup> For example, see 7.39, 14.7-24. John Paul Heil, *The Meal Scenes in Luke-Acts: An Audience-Oriented Approach* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999), 26; Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 134.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Young, 'The issue was Jesus' willingness to search diligently for the lost. He sought spiritual renewal for others through personal involvement with them. He did not wait for the undesireables of society to approach him... Rather he sought them out and demonstrated love and compassion through his personal association with them... All of this was part of Jesus' reaching out to the lost coins and straying sheep'. Young, *The Parables: Jewish Tradition and Christian Interpretation*, 190.

<sup>68</sup> Liebenberg, *The Language of the Kingdom and Jesus*, 419.

forgiving'.<sup>69</sup> In this alternate account, Jesus defends his ministry on the basis of its correspondence to God's love for the lost. The parallel between heavenly, or divine,<sup>70</sup> joy over the repentant sinner in 15.7 and the joy of the shepherd (Lk. 15.5-6) is read backward onto the shepherd as the actions of the shepherd are said to exemplify God's heart for sinners. However, the actual actions of the shepherd for Jeremias and others carry no symbolic significance for God. The shepherd broadly represents not the actions of God, but the emotions of God: God's heart or desire. If anything, it seems for Jeremias that the lost sheep brings itself home. This problematically moves the interpretation of the parable further from the parable itself. Though the climax of the parable is the joy of the shepherd, the parable also vibrantly describes the pursuit of the shepherd after the one lost sheep and the effort exerted to ensure its restoration. Moreover, though Jeremias contends that the parable demonstrates the heart of God he nevertheless suggests that the shepherd of the parable *also* represents Jesus, as God's representative.<sup>71</sup> Of course, the parable could be told with both Jesus and God in mind, but this confusion unduly robs the parable of metaphorical precision. Instead, the framing of parable in defense of Jesus' actions and his own statements concerning his seeking and saving the lost (Lk. 19.10) pressures the parable to be read as a metaphor of Jesus' ministry to the lost.<sup>72</sup>

So if the lost sheep and the shepherd represent Jesus and the lost tax collectors and sinners of the Lucan narrative, what does the parable say to the Pharisees-scribes and how might they fit within the parable? Since the parable is addressed to the Pharisees-scribes in

---

<sup>69</sup> Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 136. See also Bock, 'the shepherd pictures God's desire... Even the discovery of one such person is a cause for joy. Such is God's heart for the lost'. D.L. Bock, *Luke*, vol. 2: 9:51-24:53 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 1301.

<sup>70</sup> Jeremias considers the reference to heaven to be an indirect allusion to God, 'since emotions might not be ascribed to God'. However, this is an unnecessary inference, since even Philo is capable of attributing joy to God who 'rejoices in giving whenever those who receive are worthy of the gift'. (*Somn.* 2.177). According to this standard of worthiness, wonders what Philo might have thought about the Matthean and Lukan parable.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 132, 36. See also Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, 214. A similar point is made by Hultgren, who says that the shepherd represents both Jesus and God, 'the shepherd is metaphor for God or Jesus himself as God's envoy—and no clear distinction need be made—the message becomes clear: God delights in the recovery of the lost'. Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary*, 58-59. Jeremias makes a similar comparison since Jesus is 'God's representative'. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 132, 36.

<sup>72</sup> Turning to the parable of the prodigal son, the imagery shifts from the activity of the shepherd and passivity of the sheep to the passivity of the father and the repentant activity of the prodigal son. This shifts the emphasis and subject matter of the dialogue from Jesus' own activity to that of the repentant tax-collectors and sinners, as noted by Drury, 'Repentance is decidedly a human act. Luke's solution is to leave the symbolic treatment of the sheep and the coin for direct treatment of a human being. Only that will do full justice to the theme... The story of the *lost and found son* follows upon the stories of *lost and found sheep* and *coin* and is born of them; yet born of their limitations, and the overcoming of them, as much as of their positive power to suggest and stimulate. This is some reason for the unequalled quality of the *lost son*.' Drury, *The Parables in the Gospels: History and Allegory*, 141.

response to their complaints, this is Luke's own intended meaning of the parable in accordance with his biographical hermeneutic. The issue in view here is specifically the Jewish leaders' hostile reaction to Jesus and his association with sinners. While the parable is a defense of Jesus' ministry, it is so specifically by challenging the Pharisees-scribes negative response. The parable then illustrates for the Jewish leaders their proper response to Jesus' ministry. Jesus, as the shepherd, has sought the lost sinners and called them to repentance. And returning from this search Jesus calls his neighbors to rejoice in his discovery. The pleading of the shepherd, 'rejoice with me, for I have found my lost sheep', is analogously posed by Jesus to the Pharisees-scribes, directly identifying the Pharisees-scribes with the friends and neighbors of the parable.<sup>73</sup> The joy of the shepherd in finding the lost sheep proliferates to an increasingly wider audience: first to his immediate friends and neighbors and extending to heaven itself. But rather than joyfully celebrating with Jesus the return of those who have been lost, the Pharisees-scribes disparage the shepherd for having returned with unworthy sheep. Just as the company of heaven rejoices over the repentance of a single sinner, the Pharisees-scribes should join with Jesus in his joyous celebration of the return of those who have been lost. The disproportionate joy over the repentance of the one in comparison with the ninety-nine who have no need of repentance reveals the misguided priorities of the Jewish leaders.<sup>74</sup> They complain while heaven rejoices. The appropriateness of the shepherd's actions in response to a lost sheep is meant to contrast sharply with their collective antipathy toward the 'lost' tax collectors-sinners. Jesus exhorts the Pharisees-scribes to rejoice with him and *repent* of their malcontent.<sup>75</sup>

---

<sup>73</sup> If the challenge to the Pharisees is to join with Jesus in rejoicing over the lost, then the ninety-nine sheep and the shepherd's neighbors cannot be an ironic reference to the Pharisees and scribes, as suggested by Fitzmyer and Neale. Nor can it be said that the Pharisees-scribes do not correspond to any characters in the parable, as Scott contends. J.A. Fitzmyer, *Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV* (Garden City: Doubleday Religious Publishing Group, 1985), 1078; D.A. Neale, *None But the Sinners: Religious Categories in the Gospel of Luke* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 162-64; Scott, *Hear Then the Parable: A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus*, 407.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Talbert, 'If his associates join the shepherd in his rejoicing when a lost sheep has been found, how much more should the Pharisees join heaven in its joy over the repentance of a sinner. Can you join me, says Jesus to his critics, in my rejoicing over the reclamation of any of the outcasts with whom I eat and drink?'. C.H. Talbert, *Reading Luke: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2002), 178. Thus, the contrast of this scene is not between two reactions to Jesus, that of the tax collectors and sinners and the Jewish leaders, but between Jesus and the Jewish leaders, as recognized by Lee, *Luke's Stories of Jesus*, 278-80. Pace Mendez-Moratalla, *The Paradigm of Conversion in Luke*, 132-33.

<sup>75</sup> This suggestion is confirmed when looking at the parable of the lost sheep's surrounding context. In the surrounding parables of the lost coin and lost sons Jesus continues to address to the Pharisees-scribes and their relation to lost people. The structure and plot of the parable of the lost coin almost precisely matches that of the parable of the lost sheep. An item is lost, it is diligently searched for, and when it is found there is communal joy. The overwhelming emphasis is the action taken by the protagonist and her joyous celebration. The parable of the prodigal son uniquely illustrates the repentance of its protagonist, the younger son, but its significance within the

As with Matthew and Thomas, there are a number of features of the parable that are under-utilized within the Lucan interpretive context. While for Matthew the ninety-nine sheep refer to the faithful members of the church, for Luke their identity remains unclear. If the Pharisees-scribes are to mimic the neighbors of the shepherd, then who are these figurative ninety-nine who have no need of repentance?<sup>76</sup> Surely it cannot refer to the revered figures of the birth narrative, who are said to be righteous (Lk. 1.5-6, 2.25). For Luke, this is a category of people which cannot apply to Jesus' present company as both the tax collectors-sinners and Pharisees-scribes are unrighteous and stand before God in need of repentance. Immediately after Jesus finishes his parables, he accuses the Pharisees-scribes of establishing their own righteousness before men, claiming an exalted status for themselves that is detestable before God (Lk. 16.15). John the Baptist came and preached a message of baptism of repentance (Lk. 3.3), but Luke reports that the Pharisees and lawyers were not baptized by John, thereby rejecting the purposes of God (Lk. 7.30). In 18.9-14 Jesus tells a parable of a Pharisee who trusts in himself that he is righteous and declares that this self-understanding in fact makes one unrighteous. Despite Luke's repeated usage of the phrase, those 'who have no need of repentance', it is problematic to find any particular character who he considers to be the ninety-nine who do not need to repent. Consequently, it is difficult to decipher the fate of the ninety-nine or how the parable's numeric contrast between the ninety-nine and one sinner is to be understood. Has Jesus only come for a few individuals? If heaven rejoices *more* over the ninety-nine, does this still imply that those who have no need of repentance remain safe in the fold? Or does the silence of the parable imply some sort of judgment? These are all unanswered questions within the Lucan parable. Since there is no actual individual in the narrative who may be said to have no need of repentance, then the status of the ninety-nine and the parable's contrast between the many and the one has no immediate implication for either the reader or within the narrative world.<sup>77</sup> As with Matthew and Thomas, each interpretation offers its own distinctive rendering of the parable and certain features of the

---

broader discourse continues the prior two parables' theme of joyous celebration over the return of lost things. Like the older brother, the Jewish leaders refuse to celebrate the lost sinners' restoration and Jesus entreats them to join in the celebration.

<sup>76</sup> A similar point is made by Goulder, 'The ninety-nine who did not wander have a natural meaning in Matthew's church life: but to Luke, and in the setting Luke has given them, there is not one of the ninety-nine who is not in need of repentance'. Goulder, *Luke: A New Paradigm*, 606.

<sup>77</sup> This is particularly evident when comparing the parable of the lost sheep with its sister parable of the lost coin, which lacks any numeric contrast between the found coin and the other coins. This difference between otherwise identical parables highlights the uneasiness of this contrast within the parable of the lost sheep.



parable will be highlighted to the detriment of others as the parable interfaces with its literary context.

### 3.4. Jesus' Ministry of Eating

As seen above, the parable of the lost sheep dramatically narrates the actions of Jesus and his ministry to the lost and this teaching has a significant role within the wider narrative. The controversy of Luke 15 is one of several instances within the Lukan narrative where Jesus' teaching occurs within a dining setting. Beyond the particulars of Luke 15, these form the wider background within which the parable of the lost sheep resides. It is popular to propose that this table-fellowship with tax collectors-sinners is one of the hallmarks of Jesus' ministry,<sup>78</sup> but it would be more accurate to say that, in Luke, Jesus is an indiscriminate socialite,<sup>79</sup> showing a balanced impartiality to both tax collectors and Pharisees. Jesus eats with: a Pharisee (Lk. 7.36-50), a second Pharisee (Lk. 11.37-54), a ruler of the Pharisees (Lk. 14.1-24), a tax collector (Lk. 5.27-32), and a chief tax collector (Lk. 19.2). Jesus' mission is directed toward sinners in need of repentance, a status which includes both Pharisee and tax collector. The parable of the lost sheep falls within the second of three scenes where Jesus eats with tax collectors-sinners that follow the same pattern.<sup>80</sup> The tax collectors-sinners are said to draw near to Jesus, prompting the nearby Pharisees-scribes to complain/grumble/object (διαγόγγυζω) loudly that Jesus receives sinners and eats with them. The scene in 15.1 is strongly reminiscent of the prior encounter with the Pharisees-scribes and Jesus' eating with tax collectors-sinners found in Luke 5.29-32, as well as a future incident in Luke 19.2-10. In the former scene, the recent convert Levi, the tax collector, has made a great feast for Jesus, his disciples and his other tax collectors, leading the Pharisees-scribes to complain (γογγύζω) about the presence of tax collectors-sinners in Jesus' company. Likewise, in Luke 19, Jesus

---

<sup>78</sup> A point made by Rowan Williams, 'The covenanted faithfulness of God would once and for all overcome and cast out the unfaithfulness of the people. Thus Jesus acts for a community that does not yet exist, the Kingdom of God: he chooses rabbis and judges for the twelve tribes of the future, he heals and forgives, he takes authority to bring the outcasts of Israel into this new world by sharing their tables'. R. Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 203. It would be better to say that Christ's mission is to all people, Pharisee and tax collector, as both are in need of repentance (a point well illustrated by the parable of the Pharisee and tax collector in Luke 18.9-14).

<sup>79</sup> Cf. P. F. Esler, 'Table Fellowship as a Literary Motif in the Gospel of Luke,' *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106 (1987); Heil, *The Meal Scenes in Luke-Acts: An Audience-Oriented Approach*; D. E. Smith, 'Ceremonies in Luke-Acts: The Case of Meals and Table Fellowship,' in *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation*, ed. J.H. Neyrey (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991).

<sup>80</sup> The scene 7.36-50 also features an interaction between Jesus, a sinful woman, and Simon the Pharisee, though it is omitted here because it does not quite follow the same lexical pattern of the other three.

lodges with the tax collector Zacchaeus, which elicits complaints (διαγόγγυζω) and an accusation that Jesus has lodged with a sinful man. In each scene, it is the prior action of Jesus which prompts complaints, as well as verbal criticism, followed by a teaching of Jesus in response.

So Luke 15 then stands as the second of three scenes where Jesus has associated with a tax collector and/or sinner with an accompanying word of judgment. But read together, they also demonstrate a clear movement of the narrative: the motif is not just restated, but expanded each time it is revisited such that the final scene in Luke 19 may be said to be the climax of the motif.<sup>81</sup> In the first episode, Jesus is said to eat with tax collectors-sinners; in the second, he both receives them and eats with them; in the third, he lodges with one. In each case, there is an increasing identification of Jesus with the tax collector-sinners. If in the first instance, Jesus eats with Levi, a common tax collector, the final scene features a meal with Zacchaeus, the *chief* tax collector, an escalation of status that parallels Jesus' eating with the Pharisees.<sup>82</sup> The growth of Jesus' ministry is accompanied by more prominent hosts. There is also an intensification of disdain on the part of the observers: they first complain (γογγύζω), which then leads to more fervent complaining in the second and third encounter (διαγόγγυζω).<sup>83</sup> And so while the first verbal response takes the form of a question to Jesus concerning his conduct (διὰ τί μετὰ τῶν τελωνῶν καὶ ἁμαρτωλῶν ἐσθίετε καὶ πίνετε;), the second and third responses are not questions, but statements of objection. What is initially a polite inquiry gives way to opposition. Likewise, the antagonism Jesus faces expands from Pharisees and scribes in the first and second scenes to what seems to be the crowd in the third.<sup>84</sup> The original 'in-house' debate between Jesus and his Jewish interlocutors has expanded into popular opinion. Finally, Jesus' response to his opponents similarly intensifies. In the first scene, he offers a simple explanation for his actions: the healthy do not need a doctor. When the topic is broached again, he provides a fuller explanation comprised of four parables. In the last instance Jesus does not answer their accusation at all. Jesus' pronouncement 'Today salvation has come to this house, since he is also a son of Abraham. For the son of man came to seek and save the lost' (Lk. 19.9-10) is only addressed to Zacchaeus (εἶπεν δὲ πρὸς αὐτὸν ὁ

---

<sup>81</sup>Cf. Heil, 'The meal scene of Luke 19:1-10 brings to a climax the *theme of Jesus' meals as calls to conversion for those objecting to his meal fellowship with social outcasts and public sinners*'. Heil, *The Meal Scenes in Luke-Acts: An Audience-Oriented Approach*, 161.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Mt. 7.36 and 14.1.

<sup>83</sup> Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary*, 310.

<sup>84</sup> The third scene reports only that 'they' saw and grumbled (19.7), a non-specific reference which contextually can only refer backwards to the present crowd mentioned in 19.3.

ἡσοῦς). The motif ends with an expression of Jesus' indifference toward those who have stubbornly refused to respond to his prior teaching. The increase of rhetoric on the part of Jesus corresponds to a further separation of Jesus from his now opponents as he ventures closer to Jerusalem.<sup>85</sup>

From this, there follow a number of implications for the present study of Luke's parable of the lost sheep. Luke has a strong interest in portraying Jesus as one who eats with all social and religious classes. Unlike Mark's lone treatment of the subject (Mk. 2.15-17), it is a theme which Luke revisits several times throughout his narrative. The parable falls within one of three discourses addressing the theme of Jesus' fellowship with tax collectors-sinners. Just as the parable interfaces with its immediate context, so too can it connect within much broader narrative themes. Additionally, Luke's repeated depictions of Jesus' defense of his fellowship with tax collectors-sinners show signs of Lukan redaction. They each follow the same plot pattern, with many common key words and concerns. Differences from one another have not occurred in a random or disorderly fashion, but seem to follow a larger redactional pattern escalating the tensions subsequent to the original Markan scene. However true it might be historically that Jesus ate with tax collectors-sinners, the various settings of these meals in Luke demonstrate a great deal of redactional activity.<sup>86</sup> More importantly, it confirms conclusively the association of Jesus with the shepherd and outlines the wider narrative context into which the parable of the lost sheep has been placed. Luke has depicted several controversy scenes within his mural that build and interpret each other. Luke demonstrates a consistent interest in Jesus' affiliation with tax collectors-sinners and the increasingly hostile response this elicits from his fellow Jews. Indicative of his biographical interest in Jesus' teaching, Luke positions the parable within the second of three rejoinders Jesus gives in defense of his chosen associates and its meaning is closely identified with this setting.

---

<sup>85</sup> The road to Jerusalem is explicitly fore-grounded by the narrator prior to Jesus' final parable in 19.11 and then repeated again in 19.28.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Scott, who suggests that the Lucan setting is a fabrication, given the many correspondences between the Lucan setting and the gospel as a whole. Scott, *Hear Then the Parable: A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus*, 100-05. Conversely, Jeremias notes, 'the Matthean context [of the parable] does not help us to determine the original situation in the life of Jesus which produced the parable of the Lost Sheep. There can be no doubt that Luke has preserved the original situation'. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 40. However, both these competing alternatives fail to envision a positive role for tradition/reception and Luke's own narrative-historical claim. Cf. Watson, *Gospel Writing: A Canonical Perspective*, 208.

### 3.5. The Parable of the Lost Sheep in Acts?

While this has strictly been a study of Luke's interpretation of the parable of the lost sheep, it does lend credence to the idea that Luke, as the first of two volumes functioned primarily as a biography of Jesus, forming the background and basis upon which the Pauline kerygma arose as the message of the church.<sup>87</sup> The Jesus of Luke's parable of the lost sheep fails to assume an exemplary character and there is no indication how or whether Jesus' seeking of the lost is to be replicated by either the reader of the gospel or his subsequent followers.<sup>88</sup> No attempt is made by Luke to coordinate the past of Jesus' ministry to the present setting of the church. Jesus' parabolic teaching does not belong to the present, but to the past of Jesus' ministry.<sup>89</sup> It is significant that when the issue of table-fellowship arises in Acts 10-11, no mention is made of Jesus' own fellowship with tax-collectors and sinners as a precedent for Peter's eating with Gentiles.<sup>90</sup> Whether in his heavenly vision (10.10-16), subsequent explanations to Cornelius (10.28-29, 34-43), or the later rationale to the circumcision party in Jerusalem (11.5-17), neither Jesus' teaching nor his consistent practice of table fellowship are cited or alluded to in support of the new development in the Acts narrative.<sup>91</sup> Instead, Peter's actions are justified and prompted by the activity of the revelation. An angel initially appears to Cornelius (10.3-

---

<sup>87</sup> On the basis of the separate investigations by Parsons, Pervo, Gregory, and Rowe, it seems best to refrain from calling Luke-Acts a single composition with one purpose, but to recognize them as two separate works written by a single author. As such, each volume may have been written for different purposes while also reflecting similar themes and a common theological outlook. A. Gregory, *The Reception of Luke and Acts in the Period Before Irenaeus: Looking for Luke in the Second Century* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003); A. Gregory and C.K. Rowe, *Rethinking the Unity and Reception of Luke and Acts* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2010); M.C. Parsons and R.I. Pervo, *Rethinking the Unity of Luke and Acts* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

<sup>88</sup> A point largely missed by Green when he equates narrative and proclamation, 'For Luke, "narrative" is proclamation. Luke has in mind the use of history to preach, to set forth a persuasive, narrative interpretation of God's work in Jesus'. J.B. Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 19.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. Conzelmann, 'The period of Jesus and the period of the Church are presented as different epochs in a broad course of saving history, differentiated to some extent by their particular characteristics. Thus Luke can distinguish between those commands of the Lord which were meant only for the contemporary situation... and those which are permanent... Therefore he cannot simply project present questions back into the time of Jesus. His aim is rather to bring out the peculiar character of each period'. Hans Conzelmann, *The Theology of Saint Luke*, trans. Geoffrey Buswell (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), 13.

<sup>90</sup> An omission made more striking if one considers the story of Cornelius to be the product of legendary Lukan composition. Cf. Martin Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, trans. Mary Ling (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1956), 109-22.

<sup>91</sup> Peter does cite Jesus' meal with the disciples (Acts 10.41), but this is an event which occurs specifically *after* his resurrection (Lk. 24.30-35, 41-43). Heil notes that in the eating controversy of Acts 10-11, 'The audience recalls that Jesus shared meal fellowship with tax collectors and sinners not only to celebrate their repentance and forgiveness of sins but also implicitly to call his "righteous" Jewish opponents to repent of their own sinfulness'. Yet the 'audience', or the reader of Acts, is not explicitly drawn to these scenes within Acts. Even though there are clear resonances between the scenes this only underscores their glaring omission from the controversy in Acts. Heil, *The Meal Scenes in Luke-Acts: An Audience-Oriented Approach*, 262.

6); the heavens open up to provide the first vision to Peter and the command to eat (10.11-16); the spirit directly instructs Peter to go with the men from Cornelius (10.19-20); and the Holy Spirit is given to the Gentiles (10.44-45), an event which precipitates and justifies the inclusion of the Gentiles (11.15-18).

For Luke, the decisive events of Christ's death-resurrection-ascension and the gift of the Spirit create a fundamental rupture between the activity of Jesus and the activity of the church. Though they have supreme biographical significance, the history of Jesus which precedes his kerygmatic events is not itself the kerygma which, as outlined by Luke 24.46-47, consists of the report of the passion events and the corresponding call to repentance of sins.<sup>92</sup> And while the continued work of the Spirit is largely congruent with the teaching of the earthly Jesus known *κατὰ σάρκα*, the Spirit is only given after the departure of the resurrected Christ. Through this succession, the Spirit acts on behalf of Christ in his absence and therefore one need not appeal to Christ's prior teaching for justification. Accordingly, the narration of Jesus' life by Luke does not proceed with an interest in the appropriation of the parable of the lost sheep in the present, but to re-tell the historical story of his ministry-death-resurrection and the birth of the church. Unlike Matthew, whose narrative assembles Jesus' teaching to be a handbook for the Christian community, Luke employs the narrative form's inherent orientation to the past of Jesus' life to interpret Jesus' parables biographically. His verisimilar retelling incorporates the parable of the lost sheep within a controversy setting between Jesus and the Jewish leaders and his fellowship with tax collectors-sinners and the meaning of the parable is confined by Luke to these immediate concerns.

#### 4. Luke, Matthew, and Thomas - Three Methods of Mediation

Comparing Luke's biographical hermeneutic with Matthew's exemplary hermeneutic and Thomas' de-historicizing hermeneutic, Luke shares a 'mural' hermeneutic with Matthew, but unlike Matthew and Thomas he demonstrates little interest in the parable's contemporary implications. These texts thus espouse three different hermeneutics of history which may be placed on a common continuum. Luke's biographical interest in the history of Jesus has resisted the type of sustained incursions of the present into the past of Jesus' ministry which

---

<sup>92</sup> It follows that Jesus' own call to repentance is essentially different from the call to repentance of sin in Acts, since the former occurs on the basis of his person and ministry while the latter is in response to Jesus' death/resurrection.

mark Matthew's portrait of Jesus.<sup>93</sup> Unlike Matthew, whose context pivots from the care of God for the lost 'little ones' to the church's care for the lost brothers, the Lucan context for the parable of the lost sheep remains exclusively related to the historical situation of Jesus' ministry. For Luke, the disciples are not mentioned as recipients or even hearers of Jesus' teaching to the Pharisees-scribes. They have exited off stage and are not recalled by Jesus until 16.1. While Matthew envisions a mediation of Jesus' past parabolic teaching to the church through the teaching of the disciples, here Luke forestalls such a possibility. Certainly the presence of this teaching within Luke's gospel shows that Jesus' teachings have been handed down (Lk. 1.2) to Luke, but this process of handing down tradition culminates for Luke in the composition of a gospel which possesses a biographical interest in Jesus, strictly situating the meaning of Jesus' parable within the particularity of the historical narrative. For Luke and his mural/narrative approach, the embedding of the Jesus tradition within a narrative framework may distance its subject matter from the present through its historical realism. For Matthew's 'mural' approach, it is precisely through its historical origin that Jesus' teaching has present day significance. Were his story of Jesus to prove to be fictional, then it would be robbed of its demand on the present. Here past history and present theology are not mutually exclusive alternatives. Rather the latter depends upon the former and vice versa. It is not so with Luke, whose biographical narrative presupposes that the past teaching of Jesus is not constitutive for the present work of the Spirit. Certainly, Luke does view some aspects of Jesus' history to be transcendent (for example, the resurrection), but this does not seem to be true of the parable of the lost sheep. Instead, the death-resurrection-ascension of Jesus is the midpoint of all human history and the turning point between the age of Jesus and the age of the church.<sup>94</sup> The Gospel of Thomas shares with Luke a Christological interpretation of the parable of the lost sheep, but

---

<sup>93</sup> Cf. Franklin, 'Luke's historical dimension inevitably points to differences in time and so seems to divide events and to describe parts in terms which do less justice to their incorporation into the whole. That is his chosen method'. Eric Franklin, *Luke: Interpreter of Paul, Critic of Matthew* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 22. This is not to say that Luke approaches this subject matter in a modern, objective way, seeking to offer a neutral account of Jesus' ministry. The prologue of the gospel plainly makes known his apologetic intention (Lk. 1.4); nevertheless Luke has a keen historical interest. Cf. Eugene Lemcio, *The Past of Jesus in the Gospels*, vol. 68, SNTSMS (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 88-90.

<sup>94</sup> Here one might find justification for Bultmann's distinction between the proclaimer and the proclaimed. Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel, 2 vols., vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), 33-37. See also Moltmann, 'The gospel of the coming kingdom and of present liberation is incarnate in the suffering of Jesus and finally assumes the form of the one who was crucified. On the basis of the identification of his message with his person Jesus can be called 'the incarnation of the promise' of the kingdom. That is why Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God can only, after his death and in light of his resurrection, be continued as the proclamation of the Jesus the Christ of God, the crucified and risen liberator of men'. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1977), 82.

the voice of Jesus is addressed in each to two entirely different audiences. According to his 'data' approach, Thomas' Jesus speaks directly to the reader through the scribal activity of Thomas himself while Luke's Jesus speaks only to the Jewish interlocutors of his day. While Luke's Christological interpretation of the parable is utilized to explain Jesus' identity in defense of his ministry to tax collectors and sinners, Thomas' Jesus tells the parable to describe Jesus' salvific movement toward the present-day reader who has wandered from the mainstream church.

Accordingly, a few conclusions may be drawn about the nature of the 'data' and 'mural' approaches to the Jesus tradition. As Matthew and Luke's interpretations of the parable of the lost sheep demonstrate, narrative hermeneutic contains an inherent orientation to the past datum of Jesus' teaching and its historical context.<sup>95</sup> Inasmuch as the narrative does not portray either the author or reader, there are temporal distances between reader, author, and the narrative world of the text. For the authors of Matthew and Luke, the world they narrate is firmly set within the previous course of historical events and therefore the teachings of Jesus within their narratives must be primarily concerned with the past. In seeking to compose gospels that narrate the life and teachings of Jesus within history, Matthew and Luke *select* the 'mural' hermeneutic as the most appropriate hermeneutic for their authorial purposes and it is difficult to imagine another more suitable approach.<sup>96</sup> Yet it is not strictly the case that this past orientation of a written narrative is employed to subjugate the Jesus tradition to the present significance of the community and the continued speech of the risen Lord, as suggested by Kelber.<sup>97</sup> He repeatedly contrasts the living, present and freely creative oral form of Jesus' saying with the regressive and confining nature of textuality. But as shown above, the issue is not textuality versus orality, but one's chosen interpretive approach. Moreover, even this contrast has proven to be less a stark contrast between two mutually exclusive alternatives, but rather interpretive approaches that exist within a common spectrum. This is acutely seen

---

<sup>95</sup> Cf. Ricoeur, 'And it is at the level of this mediation, where the writing of history is preceded by something already recounted, that historicity and narrativity are confounded and confused. So it is in this sense that repetition may be spoken of as the foundation of historiography. But it is a repetition that is always articulated in a narrative mode. ... In this sense, therefore, the theory of narrativity rectifies the theory of historicity to the extent that it receives its leaven for the theme of repetition from the theory of narrativity'. Paul Ricoeur, 'Narrative Time,' *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 1 (1980), 189.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. Käsemann, 'However strongly [the canonical Gospels'] conceptions of the history of Jesus may differ... it is interest in this history which we have to thank, both for their genesis and for their form, which stands out in such particular relief against both the rest of the New Testament and the other literature of the time'. Ernst Käsemann, 'The Problem of the Historical Jesus,' in *Essay on New Testament Themes* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 25.

<sup>97</sup> Werner H. Kelber, *The Oral and Written Gospel: The Hermeneutics of Speaking and Writing in the Synoptic Tradition, Mark, Paul and Q* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).

in the Gospel of Matthew, for whom the past sayings of Jesus are carried forward in time by the community to realize an increase in meaning. Conversely, the ‘data’ approach *tends* to have far fewer temporal constraints, presenting Jesus’ teachings in a timeless and discrete fashion. Because each saying is interpreted freely, without the temporal referents present throughout the narrative gospels, the ‘data’ approach is intrinsically disposed toward a greater de-historicizing hermeneutic intent on the present-day meaning of Jesus’ teaching. Rather than a desire to appear mysterious or to conceal the meaning of a saying, the Gospel of Thomas’ choice of a ‘data’, sayings collection approach reflects a desire for Jesus’ teachings to be understood in the present, apart from the perceived limitations of their historical origins. It is a genuine strength of the ‘data’ approach that it can so readily appropriate the Jesus tradition within the shifting present-day contexts, but it does so at the expense of history. Thus, within early Christianity the canonical gospels of Matthew, Luke, and Mark (by implication) represents a tradition which largely seeks to preserve the past origins of Jesus’ teaching, sometimes to the detriment of their present-day significance, while the Gospel of Thomas and ‘data’ hermeneutic represents a tradition which is inclined to find continuing significance for Jesus’ teaching at the expense of their original historical circumstances.<sup>98</sup>

#### 4.1. Bultmann and Frei’s Hermeneutics of History

Turning again to Rudolf Bultmann and Hans Frei, the tendencies of Thomas and Mt/Lk’s interpretative approaches have strong affinities with these modern day representatives of the ‘data’ and ‘mural’ hermeneutics. The de-historicizing tendencies evident in the Gospel of Thomas are mirrored by Bultmann’s own interpretation of the Jesus tradition. Though he seeks to outline the teachings of the historical Jesus, his resultant interpretation paradoxically emphasizes its transcendental, and therefore de-historicized, character. For Bultmann, the parable of the lost sheep illustrates that ‘[the poor] better understand God’s claim than respectable people, so they also better understand how to let him (God) give’.<sup>99</sup> Similar to Thomas’ interpretation of the parable, which encourages the reader to freely associate

---

<sup>98</sup> It follows that the use of a ‘data’ approach for the purposes of the historical study of Jesus inappropriately overlooks Thomas’ own interpretive goals. The Gospel of Thomas does not characterize itself as a repository of the historical Jesus, but the teachings of the ‘Living Jesus’ to be understood by the interpreter in the present. See again, Schröter, ‘It would therefore be inappropriate to make the sayings tradition the decisive, let alone the only starting point for the historical Jesus question and set it over against a supposedly “kerygmatic” narrative tradition’. Schröter, *From Jesus to the New Testament*, 92.

<sup>99</sup> ‘Denn wie solche den Anspruch Gottes besser vernehmen als die Korrekten, so verstehen sie auch besser, sich schenken zu lassen’. Bultmann, *Jesus*, 187. Cf. Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word*, 204.



themselves with the lost sheep, Bultmann associates the lost sheep with all those who accept God's grace. The upstanding refuse this gift because they, 'cannot understand what God's grace and forgiveness is, that man can only receive God's goodness as a gift, and that therefore only the sinner really knows what grace is'.<sup>100</sup> Freed from the temporal constraints of narrative, the parable of the lost sheep is then a contrast between two eternal categories of people,<sup>101</sup> the justified sinner and the respectable people who reject grace. Just like Thomas' 'data' approach, Bultmann's anthropological interpretation of the parable exhibits little to no interest in the historical circumstances of Jesus' original teaching and instead interprets it in a de-historicizing manner.

But further inquiry into Bultmann's 'data' hermeneutic reveals that this reading of the parable of the lost sheep is mostly making the best of an otherwise insurmountable situation, and a deeper, systemic issue pervades Bultmann's 'data', form-critical approach when it comes to a historical understanding of Jesus' parables. In the discussion on parables/similitudes in his *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, Bultmann recognizes that 'the view of the evangelists does not come through a specially formed incursion, but is simply expressed by *inserting [the parable] into a particular context*'.<sup>102</sup> This initial insight concerning the 'mural' hermeneutic of Mt/Mk/Lk gives way to his historical concerns and the evangelists' contexts for the parables are largely discarded, given their secondary nature. Having laid bare the Jesus tradition of all its inauthentic incursions, Bultmann asks what kind of history he has created and he is left with more questions than answers. He concludes that, '*the original meaning of many parables has become unrecognizable in the course of the tradition*'.<sup>103</sup> While the general meaning of a parable may be inferred, its 'specific point [spezielle Point]' remains a mystery.<sup>104</sup> Having freed the parables from their narrative, contextual rendering, Bultmann appears to have cut down the very limb he was sitting upon, for without its narrative anchoring in the life of Jesus Bultmann is unable to ascertain the parables' original meanings. In the same way that Thomas presents a de-historicized interpretation of the parable of the lost sheep, when a 'data'

---

<sup>100</sup> 'Die nicht begreifen können, was Gottes Gnade und Vergebung ist, die nicht verstehen, daß der Mensch Gottes Güte nur als Geschenk empfangen kann und daß deshalb eigentlich erst der Sünder weiß, was Gnade ist!'. Bultmann, *Jesus*, 189. Cf. Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word*, 206.

<sup>101</sup> Anticipating the claims of Chapter Four, Bultmann's disinterest in the Christological reality of the parable is a notable, second tendency of a 'data' hermeneutic.

<sup>102</sup> 'Die Auffassung der Evangelisten kommt oft aber nicht in einer eigens gebildeten Einleitung, sondern einfach durch die Einfügung in einen bestimmten Zusammenhang zum Ausdruck'. Bultmann, *Geschichte* 209. Cf. Bultmann, *History* 193.

<sup>103</sup> 'Bei vielen Gleichnissen ist im Lauf der Tradition der ursprüngliche Sinn unerkennbar geworden'. Bultmann, *Geschichte* 216. Cf. Bultmann, *History* 199.

<sup>104</sup> Bultmann, *Geschichte* 216; Bultmann, *History* 199.

approach is employed toward historical study the results are mixed at best. Like swimming against the current of a fast-flowing river, a 'data' approach is at cross purposes when applied to historical study. However much a historian like Bultmann may wish to object to the verisimilitudes of Matthew or Luke, these prove to be essential for historical understanding. But the 'data' approach to the Jesus tradition regards this narrative contextualization with antipathy and opts instead to emphasize the contemporaneity of Jesus' teaching.

By contrast, the 'mural' approaches of Mt/Lk inalienably preserve the past historical referent in their understandings of the parable of the lost sheep. This inherent orientation of a 'mural' hermeneutic toward history is especially clear in the writings of Hans Frei. Though he does not offer any interpretation of the parable of the lost sheep, his analysis of the narrative form of the three synoptic gospels makes several appropriate comments on their historical character. The foundation of Frei's 'mural' approach lies in the suggestion that the narrative means what it purports to be. This suggests that the past character of history-like narrative entails a claim concerning the truthfulness the events described: '[the Gospels] are history-like precisely because like history-writing and the traditional novel and unlike myths and allegories they literally mean what they say. There is no gap between the representation and what is represented by it'.<sup>105</sup> The realistic or literal depiction of narrative events possesses an inherent orientation to the past of these genuinely historical events.<sup>106</sup> The past reference and its constitutive role for the meaning of the narrative text is an essential characteristic of both Matthew and Luke's 'mural' interpretation of the parable of the lost sheep. It follows that a historical study of the gospels might best operate according a 'mural' approach to more positively value the role of narrative features.<sup>107</sup>

But if Matthew and Luke appropriate this parable toward divergent ends, either exemplary or biographical, Frei's 'mural' hermeneutic in *The Identity of Jesus* aligns more closely with Luke rather than Matthew, a point that Frei himself later acknowledged.<sup>108</sup> For if

---

<sup>105</sup> Frei, *The Identity of Jesus*, 11-12.

<sup>106</sup> I should note, however, that Frei himself is at a loss for words when it comes to describing the kind of truth the narratives gospels report about the past: "To the question, how do we then use the complex term "empirical" or "historical factuality" in relation to the New Testament portraits, type 4 theologians [such as Barth and Frei himself] have no definite answer... The category "factuality" is simply inadequate (not wrong) for the interpretation of this text." Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, 85.

<sup>107</sup> Cf. Schröter, "Taken on its own, the sayings tradition does not lead to a picture of the activity of Jesus. Rather it serves to make impulses of Jesus fruitful for the formation of an early Christian ethos... By contrast, it is first the synoptic Jesus narratives that link the sayings tradition with the activity of Jesus in a thoroughgoing manner and thereby establish the foundation for its historical evaluation". Schröter, *From Jesus to the New Testament*, 89.

<sup>108</sup> This point was discovered by Mike Higton in notes Frei made on Maurice Wiles' review of *The Identity of Jesus*. Next to a sentence where Wiles critiques Frei for artificially constructing one harmonized story

Matthew's narrative envisions the past of Jesus' teaching to reach forward in time toward the present-day Matthean community, Luke's forestalling such a contemporary application is comparable to Frei's insistence on the stark division between the two.<sup>109</sup> As noted by Demson, 'A lacuna has opened between Frei's expository description of Jesus' identity and his description of Jesus' indirect presence now', one he believes would be bridged were Frei to outline Jesus' continuing relationship with his apostles.<sup>110</sup> This is precisely the approach taken by the Gospel of Matthew, who does not confine the meaning of his 'mural' to its temporal narration. Frei would later acknowledge the constitutive role of the community in the interpretive process, bringing him closer to Matthew's position, yet this shift has occurred through further reflection on the social nature of language and knowledge rather than a closer reading of Matthew.<sup>111</sup> Nevertheless, Luke and Matthew vindicate Frei's early and later 'mural' approaches and together they constitute the range within which a 'mural' approach may interpret the past of Jesus' life.

If 'data' and 'mural' approaches to the Jesus tradition have divergent tendencies regarding the significance of history, what implications might this have for the construction of Jesus' identity? The following chapter will examine the interpretations of the parable of the tenants within Thomas, Mark, Matthew, and Luke to see if the decision for, or against, narrative has any inherent Christological implications.

---

from the four gospels Frei wrote, 'This is absolutely right. I must have been blind. At least I should have *argued* the case. Luke was my central text, and I thought Mark and Matthew had a sufficiently similar underlying pattern *in those respects that I was analyzing* to allow me the notion of one story in all three synoptic gospels. Again, my 'method' should have dictated that I at least *argue* that these three stories constitute one story, without reducing their differences. *Mea maxima culpa*'. Highton, *Christ, Providence, and History: Hans W. Frei's Public Theology*, 201. See also Kay who notes that 'Frei essentially follows Luke(-Acts), supplemented as needed by Matthew, Mark, and even John'. James F. Kay, *Christus Praesens: A Reconsideration of Rudolf Bultmann's Christology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 133.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. Frei, 'these three times of his presence—past, present, and future—do not belong together in the fashion in which succeeding historical eras merge one into the next'. Frei, *The Identity of Jesus*, 19.

<sup>110</sup> David E. Demson, *Hans Frei and Karl Barth: Different Ways of Reading Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 47.

<sup>111</sup> Cf. Frei, 'The literal ascription of Jesus of Nazareth of the stories connected with him is of such far-reaching import that it serves not only as a focus for inter-canonical typology but reshapes extratextual language in its manifold descriptive uses into a typology relation to these stories. The reason why the intratextual universe of this Christian symbol system is a narrative one is that a specific set of texts, which happen to be narrative, has become primary, even within scripture, and has been assigned a literal reading as their primary of "plain" sense. *They have become the paradigm for the construal not only of what is inside that system but for all that is outside. They provide the interpretive pattern in terms of which all of reality is experience and read in this religion*'. In this way, Frei outlines a pattern of movement from the narrative outward into the world throughout time akin to Matthew's own understanding. Hans Frei, 'The "Literal Reading" of Biblical Narrative in the Christian Tradition: Does It Stretch or Will It Break?', in *Theology and Narrative: Selected Essays*, ed. George Hunsinger and William C. Placher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 147-48.

## Chapter Four - The Christological Possibilities of Parables: The Parable of the Tenants in Thomas, Mark, Matthew, and Luke

In its sayings collection, ‘data’ approach and economic interest in the parable of the tenants, Thomas bears several distinctive traits in comparison to its canonical counterparts. By contrast, the narrative contexts of Mt/Mk/Lk can be said to represent a single, broadening tradition of a Christological interpretation of the parable, beginning with Mark and traveling to Matthew and Luke. In this way, a comparison of four texts is instead a comparison of two parallel interpretive traditions: ‘data’ and ‘mural’. Consequently, this chapter will begin with Thomas and then move on to the canonical tradition, Mark, then Matthew, and Luke. Beginning with Thomas, rather than the canonical trajectory, will allow for a close examination of the parable and its function within a sayings collection without prioritizing its narrative representations. Placing Thomas outside of the canonical progression is not meant to imply either a greater claim to authenticity or its incompatibility with Mt/Mk/Lk: Thomas stands alongside these texts as an interpreter of the Jesus tradition. But the strong similarities between Mt/Mk/Lk demand that they be treated as a single tradition which follows the path forged by Mark. And so if the order of the previous chapter sought to disrupt the preference for Luke’s rendering of the parable and the assumed similarity between Matthew and Luke’s parables of the lost sheep, here, the opposite approach seems more appropriate, allowing the close proximity of the canonical texts to acutely underscore their particularities. Though the texts of Mt/Mk/Lk all transmit the parable according to a ‘mural’ paradigm, the peculiarities of each narrative underscore different aspects of the parable itself.

### 1. The Murderous, Unworthy Tenants: Thomas Saying 65

#### 1.1. General Features of the Thomasine Parable

The Thomasine parable depicts an owner of a vineyard who gives the vineyard to farmers for it to be worked. It is a description of a contractual relationship stipulating the terms of this relationship in simple, but not necessarily authoritarian terms: the owner gave (ΔΩΤΔΔΩ) the vineyard to the farmers in order that he would *receive* the fruit from their hand (ἸΔΩΙ ΜΠΕΔΚΑΡΠΟΣ ΝΤΟΟΤΟΥ). The owner sends a servant to collect the previously agreed upon fruit and the farmers beat him almost to the point of death. Upon being told by the servant of

the maltreatment the lord of the vineyard supposes that there was a mistake ('Perhaps he was not known by them<sup>1</sup>'). The owner sends an additional servant who is likewise beaten. He then sends his son, supposing that 'Perhaps they will be ashamed before my son [ΜΕΥΔΚ CΘΝΔΩΠΓΕ ρΗΤΩ ΜΠΑΩΗΡΕ]'. But knowing that the son was the heir to the vineyard, the farmers seized him and killed him. The parable ends with the common exhortation 'he who has ears, let him hear'.

## 1.2. 'I Tell my Mysteries to Those who are Worthy of my Mysteries': The Immediate Context of the Thomasine Parable

In the previous chapter, the search for an immediate interpretive setting for the parable of the lost sheep ended with the conclusion that the catchword connection of 'seeking' and 'finding' was of little value for understanding the parable. Here, the parable is placed within a trio of parables that are linked through their common economic subject matter, rather than catchword links.<sup>2</sup> This set of parables is then introduced by Saying 62, which concerns the worthiness of the recipients of Jesus' teaching, and is followed by Saying 66, a distant echo of Psalm 118.22 (LXX 117.22). These sayings form the immediate interpretive context for the parable of the tenants and the appropriateness of such a grouping will be demonstrated as the discussion proceeds.

In Saying 62 Jesus states that 'I speak my mysteries to those who are [worthy] of [my] mysteries (ΕΙΧΩ ΝΝΔΜΥCΤΗΡΙΟΝ ΝΝΕ[ΤΜΠΩΔ] Ν[ΝΔ]ΜΥCΤΗΡΙΟΝ)', followed by the exhortation 'what your right (hand) will do, do not let your left (hand) know what it does (ΠΕ[Τ]Ε ΤΕΚΟΥΝΔΜ ΝΔΔΩ ΜΗΤΡΕ ΤΕΚΕΒΟΥΡ ΕΙΜΕ ΧΕ ΕCΡ ΟΥ)'. The saying advocates a divide between the worthy who receive from Jesus knowledge of his mysteries and the unworthy from whom these mysteries are concealed. As in its parallel in Matthew 6.3, secrecy must be maintained. Since Jesus does not reveal his mysteries to the unworthy, the Thomasine

---

<sup>1</sup> Lambdin suggests that ΜΠΕΩCΟΥΩΝΟΥ should be amended to ΜΠΟΥCΟΥΩΝΩ. While such an alteration to the text should only be made with strong reservations, the explanation of the servant to the master and the later recognition of the son as the heir by the servants make much more dramatic sense if they previously do not recognize the first servant. Therefore the suggested emendation is followed here. Thomas O. Lambdin, 'The Gospel According to Thomas,' in *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2-7: Gospel According to Thomas, Gospel According to Philip, Hypostasis of the Archons, and Indexes*, ed. Bentley Layton, Nag Hammadi Studies XX: The Coptic Gnostic Library (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989), 78.

<sup>2</sup> Jean Marie Sevrin, 'Un groupement de trois paraboles contre les richesses dans L'Évangile selon Thomas. Ev Th 63, 64, et 65,' in *Les Paraboles Évangéliques. Perspective Nouvelles*, ed. Jean Delorme (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1989). Pace Koester, who considers the introduction of Saying 62 and parabolic unit of 63-65 to be connected before Thomas, and therefore has little bearing on the interpretation of Thomas itself who 'does not make any attempt to spell out this theory of the secret with respect to the parables which follow'. Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels*, 101.

Christian must conceal their wisdom from the unworthy outsider.<sup>3</sup> It is this injunction to secrecy from the unworthy which introduces the parables of Sayings 63-65, which illustrate in negative terms the unworthy recipients of Jesus' wisdom. Each of these parables features an individual or group who demonstrate their unworthiness for Jesus' mysteries, both in their actions and the resultant effects.

Saying 63 is a parable of a rich man who invests his money in order to earn a surplus of produce so that he will not need anything. The parable depicts the polar opposite of Jesus' explicit command in Saying 95: 'If you have money, do not lend it at interest, but give it to one from whose hand you will not receive it'. Much like Charles Dickens' Ebenezer Scrooge, the rich man has many riches, but instead of giving them away he keeps them for himself to earn a material prosperity that will guarantee worldly certainty against the uncertainty of the future.<sup>4</sup> This rich man does not see the fruits of his investment, but died that very night, a death which marks the judgment of the rich man.<sup>5</sup> Though the abundance of goods would have promised to prolong his life indefinitely, the rich man's unexpected death reveals that life cannot be gained through the acquisition of possessions.<sup>6</sup> Not only is the pursuit of life through economic gain futile, it is also counterproductive. By pursuing wealth rather than giving it away the rich man simultaneously overlooks the hidden mysteries of Christ, the only true source of life. Saying 64 and the parable of the banquet continues this line of argument and illustrates it more fully. If Saying 63 features a character that is entirely unaware of the call of Jesus, the various individuals of the parable are each extended an invitation to the banquet. Here, the either/or between economic affairs and salvation from death is dramatized as an invitation to a banquet as each declined invitation is paired with a monetary exploit that prevents them from attending the banquet. If one pursues riches, then one necessarily rejects the wisdom of Jesus.<sup>7</sup> This is explicitly stated in the interpretive conclusion, 'Businessmen and merchants will not enter the places of my father'. By refusing the invitation from the Lord, these characters place themselves outside of 'the places of my father' and demonstrate their

---

<sup>3</sup> DeConick, *The Original Gospel of Thomas in Translation*, 204-05.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Gathercole, 'The point here seems to be an attack on commerce, especially when it is concerned with establishing a self-sufficiency in which one might claim to 'lack nothing' (63.2) because of material prosperity'. Gathercole, *The Gospel of Thomas: Introduction and Commentary*, 451.

<sup>5</sup> As Saying 111 suggests, 'The one who lives from the Living One will not see death (ΠΕΤΟΝΤ ΕΒΟΛ ΖΗ ΠΕΤΟΝΤ ΧΗΔΝΑΥ ΔΝ ΕΜΟΥ)'.  
<sup>6</sup> Cf. Valantasis, 'The activities of the world, so significantly criticized in these sayings, cannot provide the stability and fulfillment which searching for the meaning in these sayings provides, and, therefore, such activities are ultimately futile'. Valantasis, *The Gospel of Thomas*, 142.

<sup>7</sup> Grant and Freedman, *The Secret Sayings of Jesus*, 161.

unworthiness to receive the mysteries of Jesus. Only those ‘outside’ in the streets are worthy of the mysteries of Jesus that enable one enter into the secret places of the father.

But it would be inadequate to restrict the application of Sayings 63 and 64 to the realm of economics and one’s misuse of unrighteous mammon to emphasize the Thomasine community’s willful poverty.<sup>8</sup> Instead, Thomas closely identifies the forsaking of the economic sphere with a renunciation of the world in general. As Saying 110 suggests, ‘Whoever has found the world (and) become rich, let him renounce the world [ΠΕΝΤΑΔΩΝΕ ΜΗΠΡΟCΜΟC ΝΕΙΡ ΠΜΜΑΟ ΜΑΡΕCΙΔΡΝΑ ΜΗΠΡΟCΜΟC]’.<sup>9</sup> Here the conjunctive does not have its usual sequential meaning, i.e., whoever has found the world and *then* became rich, since both verbs occur within a subordinate clause with the same subject.<sup>10</sup> Instead Plisch aptly suggests that, “‘World’ and material possessions are intertwined here, so that the concluding demand of renunciation refers not only to wealth but to the world in its entirety’.<sup>11</sup> Worldly wealth undermines one’s ability to discern the truth (Saying 78) much like the affairs of the world prohibit one from finding the kingdom (Saying 27). While there is an immediate economic significance to Sayings 63 and 64, within the broader Thomasine context the abandonment of worldly riches is part of Thomas’ larger injunction to abandon the world in general.<sup>12</sup> Bringing together ethics and epistemology,<sup>13</sup> those who invest in economic success become entangled with the world and those who wish to find the life which Jesus brings must divest themselves of both the world and the assurances of riches.

So if Saying 62 constructs a contrast between the worthy recipients of Jesus’ mysteries and the unworthy reprobate from whom these mysteries are withheld, the subsequent parables of the rich man and the banquet outline negative examples of those who are unworthy, those who are mired in the world’s matrix and unable to extricate themselves. This is the immediate interpretive context of the parable of the tenants in Saying 65 and, as the third of three

---

<sup>8</sup> Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus*, 143.

<sup>9</sup> Though in Coptic the conjunctive does not normally follow a perfect tense, Layton cites some notable exceptions. Layton, *A Coptic Grammar: with Chrestomathy and Glossary, Sahidic Dialect*, 280-81 (§353).

<sup>10</sup> A parallel construction may be found in ShChass 194:57-195:2 ‘ΟΥΔΘΗΤ ΔΕ ΠΕ ΠΕΤΕΟΥΠΤΑCΙCΟΥ ΝΕΙΡΤΜΝΑ ΝΖΗΤΟΥ’ (The one who has possession and does not bestow charity with them is foolish).

<sup>11</sup> Plisch, *The Gospel of Thomas: Original Text with Commentary*, 237.

<sup>12</sup> Charles W. Hedrick, *Unlocking the Secrets of the Gospel According to Thomas: A Radical Faith for a New Age* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2010), 121-22.

<sup>13</sup> The link between ethical action and divine illumination is a common motif within the New Testament and later Christian thought, typified by Mt. 5.8, ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God’, and Rom. 1.18, ‘For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness’.

consecutive parables, the expectation is that it will follow suit with the previous two, offering a third illustration of unworthy outsiders.

### 1.3. The Good Man and the Unworthy, Wicked Tenants

The crux interpretive issue for the parable of the tenants concerns whether the ‘lord’ of the vineyard should be classified as a protagonist or an antagonist. This issue is obfuscated by a lacuna in the manuscript at the very point where this man is identified. It reads ΧΡΗ[ . . . ]C and can be rendered either as ΧΡΗCΤΟC,<sup>14</sup> a good man, or ΧΡΗCΤΗC, a usurer.<sup>15</sup> Given the Gospel of Thomas’ overall negative view toward monetary surplus, the chosen reconstruction of the text will inevitably slant the characterization of the owner of the vineyard, positively or negatively.<sup>16</sup>

In favor of ΧΡΗCΤΗC, Patterson has emphasized the exploitative character of the absentee vineyard owner. Citing Hengel’s description of the first century Palestinian absentee land ownership,<sup>17</sup> Patterson infers that the lord of the vineyard is a villainous and greedy businessman. Kloppenborg/Sevrin similarly argue for ΧΡΗCΤΗC on the basis of the tragic death of the owner’s son and the parable’s negative account of the agreement between the owner and the farmers: they work while he does nothing.<sup>18</sup> For them, the work of the farmers coincides with a larger motif in Thomas endorsing the value of work, such as the parable of the

---

<sup>14</sup> While ΧΡΗCΤΟC is commonly used in early Christianity in a Christological sense for Christ, *χριστός*, this is not how it is used in Saying 90 and such a usage here would somewhat nonsensically suggest that Christ sent his son to the vineyard.

<sup>15</sup> Supports for ΧΡΗCΤΟC include: Crossan, *In Parables*, 92; Fieger, *Das Thomasevangelium: Einleitung, Kommentar und Systematik*, 188; Grant and Freedman, *The Secret Sayings of Jesus*, 162; Guillaumont et al., *The Gospel According to Thomas*, 39; Lambdin, ‘The Gospel According to Thomas.’; Valantasis, *The Gospel of Thomas*, 143. ΧΡΗCΤΗC has been suggested by William E. Arnal, ‘The Parable of the Tenants and the Class Consciousness of the Peasantry,’ in *Text and Artifact in the Religions of Mediterranean Antiquity: Essays in Honor of Peter Richardson*, ed. Stephen G. Wilson and Michel Desjardins (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2000), 141-42; B. Dehandschutter, ‘La parabole des vignerons homicides (Mc. XII, 1-12) et l’évangile selon Thomas,’ in *L’évangile selon Marc: Tradition et rédaction*, ed. Maurits Sabbe (Gembloux: Duculot, 1974); John S. Kloppenborg, *The Tenants in the Vineyard: Ideology, Economics, and Agrarian Conflict in Jewish Palestine*, vol. 195, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 43; Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus*, 142-43; Pokorný, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Thomas*, 111; Sevrin, ‘Un groupement de trois paraboles contre les richesses dans L’Évangile selon Thomas. Ev Th 63, 64, et 65.’

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Plisch, ‘The restoration of the lacuna in the first sentence could be decisive for understanding of the parable in its version at hand’. Plisch, *The Gospel of Thomas: Original Text with Commentary*, 160.

<sup>17</sup> Martin Hengel, ‘Das Gleichnis von den Weingärtner. Mc 12,1-12 im Lichte der Zenonpapyri und der rabbinischen Gleichnisse,’ *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche* 59 (1968). See also John S. Kloppenborg, ‘Isaiah 5:1-7, The Parable of the Tenants and Vineyard Leases on Papyrus,’ in *Text and Artifact in the Religions of Mediterranean Antiquity: Essays in Honor of Peter Richardson*, ed. Stephen G. Wilson and Michel Desjardins (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2000).

<sup>18</sup> Kloppenborg, *The Tenants in the Vineyard*, 257; Sevrin, ‘Un groupement de trois paraboles contre les richesses dans L’Évangile selon Thomas. Ev Th 63, 64, et 65,’ 436.



mustard seed, which falls on ground that is worked (ΕΤΟΥΡ̄ 20B). The parable of the sower in Saying 9 notes that the productive seed produced fruit toward heaven (ΔC† ΚΑΡΠΟC Ε2ΡΔ̄Ι ΕΤΠΕ) and Sayings 107 and 109 emphasize the arduous nature of the search for knowledge. Given such a context, a negative assessment of the owner is inevitable and the preference for ΧΡΗCΤΗC is obvious.

This conclusion, however, does not stand close scrutiny. It is important to note that ΧΡΗCΤΟC is a Greek loan word already found within Thomas in Saying 90 as well as other Nag Hammadi texts and ΧΡΗCΤΗC is attested ‘neither in any other literary nor documentary texts’<sup>19</sup> nor has the Coptic New Testament reproduced ΧΡΗCΤΗC as a Greek loan word.<sup>20</sup> And while there is much in Thomas commending the interpreter to arduous persistence in his or her search for the elusive, secret truth, this persistence cannot be straightforwardly equated with Saying 65’s mere mention of work. By comparison, the parable of the rich man in Saying 63 clearly delineates all the work he intends to do himself (sowing, reaping, planting, filling), yet his plans are judged by his premature death.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, if the death of the son is to be understood as a tragedy, this does not cohere with Thomas’ wider exhortations to dissolve natural family bonds (Sayings 55, 99, 101). Finally, a contextualization of the parable within first century Palestine absentee landlordship might offer some aid in interpreting the parable, but Thomas offers no obvious critique of the arrangement between the owner and the farmers and the description of the owner as an absentee landlord ironically depends upon the synoptic parallels.<sup>22</sup> Instead, as Kloppenborg notes, ‘there is nothing in this description to suggest an abusive, Marxist exploitation. The land did not originally belong to the farmers, nor did the owner fail to provide the necessary capital to produce a crop’.<sup>23</sup> The relation between the lord and the farmers is one of mutual giving: the gift of the land for both food and shelter has the obligation of a reciprocal return gift of his share of the fruit.<sup>24</sup> The land is to be worked by the

---

<sup>19</sup> Plisch, *The Gospel of Thomas: Original Text with Commentary*, 160.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. L.Th. Lefort, *Concordance du Nouveau Testament sahidique, I. Les mots d'origine grecque*, vol. 124, Subsidia, 1, CSCO (Louvain: Imprimerie orientale L. Durbecq, 1950), 319.

<sup>21</sup> An objection could be made that Saying 63 does not use the specific verb for work (20B). This, however, strikes me as special pleading, since ‘work’ is not a technical term but metaphorical, as is the case in Saying 9’s ‘produced fruit toward heaven’.

<sup>22</sup> As suggested by Pokorný, ‘He is termed a usurer. Such individuals expropriated the farmers (peasants) who received the land for colonization and turned them into fully dependent laborers: They *would* work and he *might* receive. . . fruit from them. This was his idea’. Pokorný, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Thomas*, 111-12.

<sup>23</sup> Kloppenborg, *The Tenants in the Vineyard*, 255-56.

<sup>24</sup> The Coptic ⲛⲓⲁⲓ ⲛⲓⲉⲓⲕⲁⲣⲓⲟⲥ ⲛⲧⲟⲟⲩⲟⲩ could either be translated ‘he took its (the vineyard) fruit from their hand’, implying the entirety of the crop, or ‘he took his fruit from their hand’, to suggest that he received only his portion of the crop. The latter is more likely, given that the nearest subject to modify the possessive pronoun is the owner. Cf. Hedrick, *Unlocking the Secrets of the Gospel According to Thomas*, 124.

farmers and each participant (farmer and owner) is to receive their allotted portion of the harvest. This is an arrangement of reciprocal benefit and exchange with little hint of exploitation or maltreatment.<sup>25</sup> If anything, the parable seeks to explain (and possibly excuse) the somewhat illogical actions of the owner. When the first servant is maltreated, the owner assumes it was a case of mistaken identity on the part of his servant, who is not recognized by the tenants.<sup>26</sup> The sending of the son after the abuse of the second servant is meant to elicit repentance on the part of the servants: 'Perhaps they will be ashamed before him (ΜΕΨΔΚ ΟΕΝΔΨΙΠΕ ΖΗΤΩ). In his dealings with the tenants, the owner is almost kind (ΧΡΗΤΟΣ!) to a fault. This should not suggest that the owner is symbolic for God; instead the description of the owner as ΧΡΗΤΟΣ ensures the plausibility of the parable's narrative and the owner's repeatedly inappropriate response to misfortune.

Consequently, the broadly positive depiction of the good man/owner is utilized to contrast sharply with the despicable actions of the tenants.<sup>27</sup> While the owner seeks to fulfill the agreed-upon terms of the relationships by sending his servants/son, the farmers repetitively violate the equitable contractual provisions by refusing to give the owner his due. By sending the two servants away, the farmers reveal their desire for the owner's share as well. The succession of servants and resultant beatings by the tenants creates the expectation that the son will similarly be beaten and sent away. By contrast, the father expects him to be received with remorse.<sup>28</sup> The intersection of these expectations is the climax of the parable as both expectations are unfulfilled as the son is not beaten, but murdered. He is immediately recognized as the heir of the vineyard and his murder signals not only an intensification of

---

<sup>25</sup> As in the preceding parable in Saying 64, the probable wealth of the main protagonist is not criticized and a criticism should not be presupposed. *Pace* Pokorný, who considers Sayings 64 and 65 to 'represent two different attitudes', the greed of invited persons and the greed of the owner. Pokorný, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Thomas*, 111.

<sup>26</sup> It is worth noting that the supralinear stroke over the text (ϠΜϠΔλ) does not indicate that Thomas considers the servants to be 'divine figures' sent by God, as suggested by Valantasis. Elsewhere in Thomas, such as Sayings 47 and 64, ϠΜϠΔλ is written in exactly the same fashion without any indication that these are anything other than common servants. Similarly, the text copied immediately after Thomas, The Gospel According to Philip, mentions ϠΜϠΔλ on many occasions (52.2, 54.31, 62.30, 69.2, 72.17, 72.20, 77.18, 77.27, 79.15, 80.25, 80.30, 81.12, 83.26, 84.10, 85.24, 85.28), all of which include the supralinear stroke. In Philip, the servant is contrasted with positive figures such as, sons (52.2-6), free men (79.13-18), and children (81.12-14). The servant is one who sins (77.18) and serves evil as its master (85.24). Wesley W. Isenberg, 'Introduction to the Gospel According to Philip,' in *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2-7*, ed. Bentley Layton (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989), 135; Valantasis, *The Gospel of Thomas*, 144-45.

<sup>27</sup> By contrast, Morrice implausibly contends the exact opposite, making the tenants into the heroes of the parable, 'This parable is a shocking story about certain people who saw their opportunity and acted. They saw a way of getting full possession of the vineyard. "Whoever has ears let him hear"'. W. G. Morrice, 'The Parable of the Tenants and the Gospel of Thomas,' *The Expository Times* 98 (1987), 106.

<sup>28</sup> The sending of two servants and then the son forms what C.H. Dodd called a 'climactic series of three' found elsewhere throughout the gospels. Dodd, *Parables of the Kingdom*, 129.

violence against the owner, but an aspiration for the land. With increased greed comes an escalation of violence. This unexpected result is meant to shock and repulse the reader to evoke a judgment of the farmers' actions and to demonstrate the violent lengths to which they will go to possess not only the harvest, but the land itself.<sup>29</sup> The tenants, hell-bent on cutting the owner out of their prior arrangement, are blinded by their own greed, unable to see how far they have fallen down the spiral of avarice. Whereas the owner remains steadfast in his appeal to the servants, they respond with increasing hostility. What begins as a simple rejection of the owner's servant culminates in murder. The road to financial gain is paved with power and violence.<sup>30</sup> The parable of the tenants in Saying 65 is therefore an illustration of the folly of greed and its cumulative, adverse effects. Thomas has utilized the parable's inherent economic features to admonish one to avoid the fate of the tenants while there is still time and abandon worldly pursuits.<sup>31</sup> This reading is bolstered when compared with the very similar teaching in Saying 21.<sup>32</sup> As with the tenants of Saying 65, Jesus' disciples live in a field (world) that they do not own and are confronted by the owner of the field.<sup>33</sup> Unlike the tenants of Saying 65, however, Jesus' true disciples do not resist the demand for the field, but readily strip naked and give up their claim to the land. If one is to live, the field of the world must be forsaken.

#### 1.4. The Worldly Hall of Shame in Sayings 63-65

Each of these three parables illustrates a particular aspect of greed and those who are too closely attached to the affairs of the world. They are all negative examples of the failures of the unworthy. The parable of the rich man is concerned with the relation of riches and one's

---

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Crossan, 'If one had read only Thomas, the parable is, like the two preceding ones, a dire warning against the evil consequences of material greed and needed no more comment than its concluding "Let him who has ears hear." The reader is supposed to be horrified at how material desires lead to murder'. J. D. Crossan, *Four Other Gospels: Shadows on the Contours of Canon* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985), 54. While Saying 98 contains a murder which may be uncritically portrayed, this parable is not concerned with actual violence, but the need for preparedness and counting the cost. This killing in Saying 98 is meant to be understood symbolically: the 'great man', like the 'great men' of Saying 78, is in alliance with the world and, similar to Saying 21.5-8, one must be vigilant against the world. Cf. Grant and Freedman, *The Secret Sayings of Jesus*, 177.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Valantasis, 'Those who are engaged in commerce, who till the land owned by others and refuse to give produce to the rightful owner, entrap themselves in a cycle that prevents their ability to perceive divinity... Ultimately they will kill, not just abuse, the son of the property owner: their cycle of greed will end in a cycle of violence and rejection'. Valantasis, *The Gospel of Thomas*, 145.

<sup>31</sup> Hedrick, *Unlocking the Secrets of the Gospel According to Thomas*, 125.

<sup>32</sup> 'Mary said, "Whom are your disciples like?" Jesus said, "They are like children who have settled in a field which is not theirs. When the lords of the field come, they will say, 'Return our field to us'. They (will) strip naked in their presence to return it to them and they will give their field to them"'.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Gregory, '[T]he disciples (the children) in the world (the field), take off their bodies (their clothing) when the rulers of the world (the masters of the field, the archons?) demand what is theirs, the physical world and material bodies'. Riley, *Resurrection Reconsidered*, 130-31.

ultimate destiny, namely death. The attainment of worldly wealth does not forestall death and instead prevents one from discovering the true source of life. The parable of the banquet continues this line of argument and relates it more directly to present business activity. Those who are involved in mercantile endeavors reject the wisdom of Jesus and cannot enter into the places of the Father. The parable of the tenants demonstrates the downward spiral of greed and the ensuing recourse to power and uninhibited violence. The one who chooses the way of the world places themselves on a path which leads further and further away from Jesus' mysteries. Taken together, these three parables form a unit on the perils of wealth and its treacherous relation to the world and death. This interpretive collection continues with Saying 66, which functions as a summary and conclusion to the prior parables.

### 1.5. The Rejected Teaching/Cornerstone

According to its placement within a collection of parables, an economic/worldly interpretation of the parable of the tenants is likely. Upon reaching Saying 66, however, the close proximity of the parable of the tenants in Saying 65 with the cornerstone saying in Saying 66 may also lead one to suggest that the former must be understood Christologically, equating both the rejected son of the parable and the rejected stone with Jesus himself.<sup>34</sup> So Saying 66 poses the question whether Thomas presumes, with its synoptic counterparts, that the son should be understood as a metaphor for Jesus. Reading Thomas in its current form, this Christological approach is explicitly resisted, despite the proximity of the sayings. As John Dominic Crossan has noted, the end of the parable of the tenants contains the exhortation, 'He who has ears, listen', followed by the introduction 'Jesus said', effectively dividing the two from each other.<sup>35</sup> The 'ears to hear' saying occurs elsewhere at several points within Thomas (Sayings 8, 21, 24, 63, 96),<sup>36</sup> and on every occasion the saying that immediately follows is understood as a discrete

---

<sup>34</sup> This would place Thomas quite close to the Christological interpretation of the other synoptic accounts. Cf. DeConick, 'This narrative appears to have been interpreted metaphorically as a reference to those who rejected Jesus' message and killed him, since we find immediately attached to the narrative, a proof text commonly used by the Christians for this purpose (L. 66)'. But such a conclusion has little to do with the final form of the Thomas text as we have it and largely depends instead upon a hypothetical reconstruction of an earlier recension of Thomas and its understanding within the early Jewish-Christian Thomasine community. DeConick, *The Original Gospel of Thomas in Translation*, 214.

<sup>35</sup> Crossan, *In Parables*, 93. See also John S. Kloppenborg, 'Egyptian Viticultural Practices and the Citation of Isa 5:1-7 in Mark 12:1-9,' *Novum Testamentum* 44, no. 2 (2002), 135; Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels*, 101.

<sup>36</sup> Though Saying 24 serves as an introduction to a parable, the same above pattern holds true, as what follows is a continuation of previous dialogue and does not begin with the introduction, 'Jesus said'.

saying, independent of what came before.<sup>37</sup> This suggests that Sayings 65 and 66 are to be understood as separate sayings without any direct relationship between the two.

Treating Saying 66 as a distinct saying, it functions as a summary statement of the previous three parables.<sup>38</sup> The saying reads: ‘Jesus said, “Tell me about the stone, the one the builders have rejected. It is the stone of the corner”’. This depicts the assembly of a figurative building without an appropriate cornerstone. A cornerstone is just as it sounds, a stone placed at the base of two adjacent walls (the corner) to ensure a reliable joint. The building described here has been built without a cornerstone—the builders have rejected it—so it will eventually collapse under its own weight. Note that the stone is only declared to presently be the cornerstone (ⲛⲧⲟϥ ⲡⲉ ⲡⲱⲱⲛⲉ ⲛⲕⲱⲩ): no mention is made of its eventual incorporation into the building. Were the builders to have recognized the value of the stone when assembling the building, they would have avoided catastrophic failure. This continues the motif of rejection and failure prominent in Sayings 63-65. The reader must heed the warning of the parables and recognize the folly of the world and its desire for wealth. Failure to do so is as ruinous as a building without a cornerstone. The stone is therefore Jesus’ teaching concerning the folly of worldly wealth and its inability to provide one life;<sup>39</sup> it cannot be equated with Jesus’ person.<sup>40</sup> Additionally, the verb used, ⲧϥⲁⲃⲟ, anticipates this association of the stone with Jesus’ teaching, given its typical primary connotations with the act of teaching.<sup>41</sup> Finally, Jesus’ demand to be shown/told of the stone is not recorded to give ‘dem Log[ion] eine persönliche Färbung’,<sup>42</sup> but to make a Christological interpretation less likely, for the stone cannot simultaneously be Jesus and something told to him.

For a chapter investigating the Christological possibilities of the parable of the tenants, this non-Christological form of Sayings 65 and 66 is of great importance. But a glance behind into the pre-history of the text of Thomas is perhaps much more revealing. Given the close relationship between the cornerstone saying and the parable of the tenants in Thomas’ synoptic counterparts (addressed below), as well as the widespread citation of Psalm

---

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Kloppenborg, *The Tenants in the Vineyard*, 257.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Uro, *Thomas: Seeking the Historical Context of the Gospel of Thomas*, 131-32.

<sup>39</sup> Fieger coordinates Saying 66 with Saying 50 to suggest that the stone is ‘der Lichtfunke im Menschen’. This, however, overlooks the placement of this teaching in relation to the previous parables. Rather than finding the spark of light within oneself, ‘Jesus fordert den Menschen auf, den eigenen Lichtfunken erkennen’, the immediate and referent of the stone is Jesus’ prior teaching. Fieger, *Das Thomasevangelium: Einleitung, Kommentar und Systematik*, 196.

<sup>40</sup> As suggested by Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary*, 366.

<sup>41</sup> Crum, *A Coptic Dictionary*, 434b-35a. See also Plisch, *The Gospel of Thomas: Original Text with Commentary*, 163.

<sup>42</sup> Fieger, *Das Thomasevangelium: Einleitung, Kommentar und Systematik*, 195.

117/118.22 as a Christological proof text (Acts 4.11, 1 Pt. 2.7), the parable-cornerstone sequence of Thomas can hardly be a coincidence and indicates that these sayings were more clearly joined together either in an earlier form of Thomas or in the source to which Thomas is indebted.<sup>43</sup> If Sayings 65 and 66 were joined together in Thomas' source, then it is likely that this doublet was understood in a Christological manner<sup>44</sup> and the present form of Thomas has *intentionally* separated them into discrete sayings and thereby mutes a Christological, salvation-historical reading.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, the saying in its present form is devoid of any indication that the cornerstone saying derives from Psalm 117/118.22 and loses its character as fulfillment of scripture. There can be no doubt that the saying originates with Psalm 117/118.22, but instead of it being a 'loose paraphrase',<sup>46</sup> the original wording and intent of the Psalm is largely indiscernible. The psalm narrates a temporal succession whereby the previously rejected stone is then vindicated through a divine action to become the cornerstone. The reversal of the stone's status enables it to assume a prophetic character. Comparatively, Thomas lacks such a temporal succession and is instead a contrast between the evaluation of the builders and Jesus. More obviously, the saying in Thomas is not presented as a quotation of Scripture, but as a saying of Jesus who speaks with self-authenticating authority to declare the true value of the rejected stone.<sup>47</sup> So, in addition to distancing the parable of the tenants from the cornerstone saying, Thomas has robbed the cornerstone saying of its original reference to Psalm 117/118.22 by introducing it as a novel saying of Jesus concerning his own teaching.<sup>48</sup> Without a cornerstone saying identifying Jesus as the rejected cornerstone, it becomes problematic to associate Jesus with the rejected son of the parable of the tenants. Therefore it is

---

<sup>43</sup> Risto Uro tacitly suggests that the collection of the three parables in Sayings 63-65 and the addition of Saying 66 represent a harmonization of Thomas with Matthew. This composition history is possible, and it still entails a disregard for Matthew's Christological interpretation of the parable of the tenants and the cornerstone saying. Uro, *Thomas: Seeking the Historical Context of the Gospel of Thomas*, 131-32. A possibly oral Aramaic origin for Saying 66 should be excluded, as suggested by Gathercole and Baarda. Cf. Tjitze Baarda, "'The Cornerstone': an Aramaism in the Diatessaron and the Gospel of Thomas?," *Novum Testamentum* 37, no. 3 (1995); Gathercole, *The Composition of the Gospel of Thomas*, 85.

<sup>44</sup> As Crossan suggests, 'the conjunction of 93:1-16 and 17-18 as the earliest stage of the allegorization process was already available to the Gospel of Thomas or its source'. Crossan, *In Parables*, 93. Crossan refers here to the now largely outdated numbering system for Thomas according to the labels of the plates of a photographic edition of the Coptic manuscript.

<sup>45</sup> Fieger, *Das Thomasevangelium: Einleitung, Kommentar und Systematik*, 195; Scott, *Hear Then the Parable: A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus*, 244.

<sup>46</sup> Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus*, 50.

<sup>47</sup> Pace DeConick, who suggests that, '[Hearers of the parable] are told that most of the people that Jesus met were so unworthy that they were even responsible for his death (L. 65: example), a fact that is given authoritative [scriptural] testimony as support (L. 66: authoritative testimony)'. DeConick, *Recovering the Original Gospel of Thomas*, 120.

<sup>48</sup> Plisch, *The Gospel of Thomas: Original Text with Commentary*, 162. For more on Thomas' hostile relation to the Old Testament, see Tjitze Baarda, 'The Gospel of Thomas and the Old Testament,' *Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association* 26 (2003).

reasonable to suggest that the present form of Thomas has distanced itself from the Christological interpretation of the parable/cornerstone saying through a number of modifications to its possible original form.

As shown by Chapter Two, a sayings collection can be altered in both modest and drastic ways between recensions as sayings are altered, omitted, added, and transported within the text. Here, a previously Christological parable and cornerstone saying has been modestly modified away from this original meaning and toward the parable's economic and ethical implications. The additional introductory  $\pi\epsilon\chi\epsilon\overline{\iota}\varsigma$  is a minor change in scope, yet pronounced in effect, and the ostensible ease with which it happens is a distinctive feature of a sayings collection such as Thomas. Having dislocated the parable of the tenants from the cornerstone saying, the parable is free to be associated with the two prior parables with similar economic themes. It is not only that a Christological parable became ethical, but that such a change was readily possible according to Thomas' 'data' approach. But this does not suggest *why* the parable foregoes a Christological interpretation of the parable of the tenants. The answer may lie in the Coptic text's aversion for the subject, as previously seen in Saying 13. However, this is probably only part of the story and, as will become evident when compared with Mt/Mk/Lk, there is something fundamental to a sayings collection, 'data' approach that encourages such a theological shift.

## 2. The Rejection of the Son of God: Mark 12.1-11

### 2.1. General Features of the Markan Parable

In contrast to the contractual description of Thomas, Mark describes in successive detail the care and provision of the owner in constructing the vineyard.<sup>49</sup> He builds a hedge (περιέθηκεν φραγμόν), constructs a tower (ᾠκοδόμησεν πύργον), digs a wine vat (ᾠρυξεν ὑπολήνιον), and hires farmers. This language draws upon the description of the vineyard of Isaiah 5.2 (LXX), where a fence is placed around the vineyard (φραγμόν περιέθηκα), a watchtower is built (ᾠκοδόμησα πύργον), and a winepress is dug (προλήνιον ᾠρυξα). The owner goes away and 'at the proper time' he sends a servant to the farmers to collect from his tenants the fruit of the vineyard. The tenants beat this servant and send him away. Second and third

---

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, 330. The image of God as one who cares for his vineyard is dependent upon Isaiah 5, but *pace* Blomberg Mark has drawn upon this imagery for its salvation-historical implications, not simply to communicate God's kindness.

servants are sent and then mistreated by the tenants in increasingly violent fashion, climaxing in the murder of the third servant. This pattern of rebellion is continually repeated for an indefinite period of time, with the owner sending a succession of ‘many others’ that are likewise beaten or killed.<sup>50</sup> While Thomas describes the treatment of the two servants in similar terms to build the expectation that the son might also be beaten, Mark emphasizes the consistent and ongoing maltreatment of the servants by the tenants. Having seemingly run out of servants to send, an endeavor the parable considers to have transpired for an immeasurably long period of time,<sup>51</sup> the owner still has one beloved son left to send. This son is sent ‘last of all’, thinking, as with the Thomasine version, that the farmers will respect the son. If for Thomas, the knowledge that the son is the heir of the vineyard is enough to explain their actions to kill him, for Mark this inference is made explicit through the direct speech of the farmers, who reason that if they kill him then the inheritance will be theirs. Unlike Thomas’ unceremonious murder of the son, Mark records that the servants seized, killed, and then threw him out of the vineyard. Unlike Thomas, which leaves the fate of the tenants open-ended, the Markan Jesus rhetorically asks what the owner will do with the tenants, answering that the owner will destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. This rhetorical voice continues to conclude the parable with a quotation of Psalm 117/118.22.

## 2.2. ‘By What Authority?’: The Immediate Setting of the Markan Parable

The parable of the tenants is placed within a scene in Jerusalem that begins with a question from the chief priests, scribes and elders asking Jesus: ‘By what authority do you do these things? Or who has given to you this authority that you should do these things? (Mk. 11.28)’. The events of ‘these things’ of which the Jewish leaders speak refer to the cleansing of the temple the previous day. The double question of Jesus’ authority then explores both the origin and nature of Jesus’ authority. Where does it come from and how does it justify such a wild condemnation of the temple leadership? Jesus responds to this question in two ways, the first in the form of a question and the second in the form of a parable. The question Jesus asks is very much a riddle designed to condemn the respondent, asking the leaders whether John the Baptist’s authority is from heaven or man (Mk. 11.30). Much like the use of a parable in the second response, this is an indirect way to answer a challenge to Jesus’ authority and presumes

---

<sup>50</sup> This expansion of the formula of three into an unending pattern is, for Jeremias, an allegory that obscures the original picture. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 71.

<sup>51</sup> As indicated by the indefinite description ‘καὶ πολλοὺς ἄλλους’ in 12.5.



that Jesus' own actions and rejection by the leaders are related to that of the forerunner, John. The Jewish leaders' refusal to acknowledge the divine origin of John's authority and their rejection of Jesus implies that they too will refuse to acknowledge the divine origin of Jesus' authority. Therefore, knowing their answer in advance on the basis of their rejection of John, Jesus explicitly refuses to directly answer their question. Instead, Jesus elects to explain to the Jewish leaders the origin and nature of his authority by employing an elaborate parable that refers backwards to Isaiah 5 and forward to his present-day ministry.

### 2.3. One God and One Vineyard: Mark's Reading of Isaiah

It is this concern with Jesus' authority which spawns Jesus' telling of the parable of the tenants, which begins with references to Isaiah 5. In the Isaiah vineyard song, although the owner of the vineyard took great care in its construction and the planting of choice vines (ἄμπελον σωρηχ, a transliteration of the Hebrew שֶׁרֶחַ), the vineyard still produces only rotten grapes (נְאֻשִׁים) or thorns (ἀκάθυς). The owner of the vineyard is identified as God in 5.7, the vineyard itself is the house of Israel, the men of Judah are his newly planted vines, and the expected fruit is justice and righteousness. As in the parable, God comes to his people to find the fruits of justice/righteousness, but instead only finds bloodshed and an outcry. This failure of the people to produce fruit results in the destruction of the vineyard/nation, culminating in the exile of the people (Is. 5.13) and the descent of many into the mouth of Sheol/Hades. Though the parable does not explicitly cite the text of Isaiah 5, there are a number of compelling reasons to consider this passage to be the foundation for the Markan parable. As noted above, there are several strong lexical correspondences between Isaiah 5.2 (LXX) and Mark 12.2, where the description of the Markan vineyard is nearly identical to Isaiah in both language and the order of construction (fence, tower, and then winepress/vat).

Rather than simply utilizing common vineyard imagery from Isaiah 5.2, there are a number of convincing reasons to believe that the Markan parable organically grows out of Isaiah.<sup>52</sup> In both Isaiah and Mark, the owner of the vineyard desires to see the fruit of the vineyard. For both, there is a failure to produce fruit for the owner, as well as a common mention of violence in place of fruit, and a resultant death and destruction. In short, the overall structure of the Isaiah narrative is mirrored and expanded by the Markan parable. As

---

<sup>52</sup> This is not to suggest that the Isaiah reference must be found in the parable's original, historical form (though such a suggestion is not without warrant), only that it is integral to Mark's interpretation.

such, it is clear that the Isaiah vineyard song is an interpretive co-text out of which develops Mark's interpretation of the parable of the tenants as Jesus seeks to answer the question of his authority.

Differences between Isaiah and Mark are not errors or misreadings,<sup>53</sup> but reflect the creativity of the latter and the new interpretive possibilities afforded by Israel's continued history beyond Isaiah as well as the novelty of Jesus' advent. The Markan parable, through the introduction of tenants, may seem to radically depart from Isaiah, which only speaks of a vineyard and its lack of productivity. Instead, this departure occurs on the basis of a creative reading of Isaiah, as attested by its form in the Septuagint. The Masoretic text attributes the failed grape production to the vines of the vineyard itself. They do not produce good fruit, but rotten fruit (נאשׁים). However, in LXX, and even more explicitly in Targum Isaiah, the worthless crop is the product of failed management by its presiding farmers. The LXX form of the vineyard song reports that, instead of grapes, the vineyard yielded thorns (ἀκάνθας). This implies that the harvest of grapes was ruined not because of a deficiency in the vines themselves, but because these vines were not adequately protected against the natural encroachment of weeds.<sup>54</sup> But even beyond LXX, Targum Isaiah underscores the failure of the vineyard leaders in even more explicit terms.<sup>55</sup> Good or bad farmers make for abundant or poor harvests. So if the vineyard represents Israel, its farmers represent Israel's leadership. The quality of this leadership corresponds to the state of the nation that must promote justice. For LXX, Targum Isaiah, and Mark, there is an inseparable relation between the people and their leadership, the vineyard and its farmers.<sup>56</sup> The tenants of the Markan parable are then the leadership of Israel from its foundation leading up to Jesus' day and the very Jewish leaders he addresses. But it is also important to note that it is the narrative setting of Jesus' telling of the

---

<sup>53</sup> This is a common criticism of Mark and his use of the Isaiah parable, often by derisively stating it to be allegorical. Cf. Crossan, *In Parables*, 87; Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 70-77.

<sup>54</sup> As Kloppenborg notes, 'The LXX apparently already has in view the failure of human subjects who tend the vineyard'. Kloppenborg, 'Egyptian Viticultural Practices and the Citation of Isa 5:1-7 in Mark 12:1-9,' 150-51. However, *pace* Kloppenborg, the Septuagintal basis of the parable of the tenants is not an indication of the secondary nature of the Isaiah references. Rather than representing a variant strand of Masoretic Judaism, the LXX translation attests to how this parable might have been widely understood. Moreover, it is also possible that LXX preserves the more original reading, as suggested by Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 802.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. De Moor '[T]he Targum's treatment of Isa. 5 as a whole indicates that it held the leadership in Jerusalem responsible for the downfall of the people and excepted the righteous from the impending punishment'. Johannes C. De Moor, 'The Targumic Background of Mark 12:1-12: the Parable of the Wicked Tenants,' *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 29, no. 1 (1998), 68-69.

<sup>56</sup> As such, the introduction of the tenants in the Markan parable mirrors that of Targum Isaiah, and represents an augmentation of the interpretive traditions of LXX. *Pace* Childs, who, commenting on this very issue in Matthew, suggests the parable has, 'abandoned the motif of the vineyard's unproductivity and focused completely on the wicked behaviour of the tenants'. Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (London: SCM, 1992), 342.

parable which encourages such a present-day association.<sup>57</sup> Were Jesus speaking to his disciples in private, the exact identity of the tenants would be more uncertain. Since Jesus tells this parable to the chief priests, scribes, and elders in response to their questions (Mk. 11.27), the narrative creates the expectation that his response might include both Jesus and these leaders.

While there is a strong precedent within the textual tradition of Isaiah for farmers to tend to the vineyard, the introduction of servants sent from the owner of the vineyard is a creative expansion of the narrative world of Isaiah to account for the continued events of Israel's history and the ministry of Jesus.<sup>58</sup> Whereas Isaiah tells of a single event of God's assessment of the vineyard and subsequent judgment and exile, the Markan parable mediates the owner's intervention through servants and reports of multiple examinations of the vineyard. For Mark, the servants represent prophets sent to the nation of Israel by God.<sup>59</sup> The collection of the harvest by the servants is equivalent to the task of prophetic judgment, and their brutal treatment at the hands of the tenants parallels the tragic fate of Israel's prophets throughout its history, who were likewise beaten, wounded in the head,<sup>60</sup> treated shamefully, stoned, and killed. In increasingly hostile terms, the mistreatment of the servants establishes a pattern of history which is continually recapitulated. The Markan parable therefore utilizes the pre-exilic Isaiah vineyard song of judgment to describe the history of Israel from its beginnings

---

<sup>57</sup> Westermann suggests that Jesus cites the Isaiah text 'to explain why judgment has to come'. This, however, overlooks that the judgment of the tenants occurs on the basis of their response to Jesus, not their prior history of rebellion. Westermann, *The Parables of Jesus: In the Light of the Old Testament*, 187.

<sup>58</sup> It follows that the Markan reference to Isaiah is a social and historical reference to the people of Israel, rather than a geographic allusion to the temple. Such a temple reading of the parable principally depends upon a temple interpretation of Isaiah 5 found in 4Q500 1 where, 'the vineyard is Jerusalem, Israel in miniature, the tower is the sanctuary, and the winepress the altar and its drainage system which can take on various eschatological significances'. George J. Brooke, '4Q500 1 and the Use of Scripture in the Parable of the Vineyard,' *Dead Sea Discoveries* 2, no. 3 (1995), 285. Jesus would then tell the parable to criticize the temple leadership. Given that the telling of the parable of the tenants occurs in response to a question posed to Jesus concerning actions in the temple, such a reading may have some merits. Mark, however, has avoided all of these very explicit connections with the Temple and instead utilizes the parable for its depiction of Israel's unfaithfulness. Brooke, '4Q500 1 and the Use of Scripture in the Parable of the Vineyard,' 285.

<sup>59</sup> For this reason, it is unlikely that the vineyard represents the kingdom of God instead of the nation of Israel, since the prophets were sent to the elect nation of Israel. Iverson notes the difference in productivity between the Isaiah and Markan parables, as well as Mark's 'kingdom' term, *καῖρός*, in 12.2. These suggest that the kingdom of God is to be equated with the vineyard itself. But this similarly confuses the timeline of the parable, which indicates that the kingdom has come prior to the sending of the prophet and not with the advent of Jesus. Additionally, the productivity of the vineyard is perhaps to be assumed, but it is not developed by Mark's interpretation. Kelly R. Iverson, 'Jews, Gentiles, and the Kingdom of God: the Parable of the Wicked Tenants in Narrative Perspective (Mark 12:1-12),' *Biblical Interpretation* 20, no. 3 (2012); W.O.E. Oesterley, *The Gospel Parables in the Light of their Jewish background* (London: SPCK, 1936), 120.

<sup>60</sup> Crossan suggests that this injury is a reference to John the Baptist. This, however, is unlikely since it occurs to the second servant sent. John the Baptist is more likely to be obliquely in view in the *καὶ πολλοὺς ἄλλους* of 12.5. Crossan, *In Parables*, 87.

up until the time of Jesus. It is a history of unmitigated violence and bloodshed by the hands of the Jewish leaders in defiant rebellion against a patient God.<sup>61</sup>

The vineyard of Mark is then the *very same* vineyard that appears in Isaiah, owned by the same owner and managed by the same lineage of farmers. The parable's references to Isaiah 5 directly connect the history of Jesus' ministry with the preceding history of Israel and its long history of rejecting the prophets sent by God.<sup>62</sup> The salvation history of Israel leads up to and culminates in the ministry of Jesus and his ministry and that prior history is only understandable within this framework.

## 2.4. The Rejection of the Beloved Son of God

The past of Israel's history does not remain in the past, but having narrated the history of Israel prior to Jesus' advent the parable then turns its eye toward the contemporary setting of Jesus' ministry. Having exhausted his supply of servants to send, the only recourse the owner has left is to send his son, the last (ἔσχατον) of his representatives. The decision to send the son comes at the end of a long line of prophets sent to God's people and signifies the culmination of that prior history. So if the servants of the parable are depicted in such a way that their coming to the vineyard signifies the sending of the prophets, who is the son? The son, as one of a sequence of representatives, is likened to the rest of the prophets that came before. Yet the identity of the son is not reducible to his function as a prophet, since he also shares a filial relation with the owner as the heir.<sup>63</sup> Since Jesus addresses the parable to the Jewish leaders in response to their questioning of his authority, one is led to assume that the son is Jesus himself. This assumption is confirmed when noting the description of the son within the larger Markan narrative.<sup>64</sup> The son of the parable is not just a son, but a beloved son (υἱός ἀγαπητός), a

---

<sup>61</sup> This contrasts sharply with an interpretation of the parable which cites the 'earliest stage of the Gospel tradition' to side with the tenants against the 'extortion' of land owners. Cf. B.J. Malina and R.L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 199-200; Luise Schottroff, *Die Gleichnisse Jesu* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2005), 27-31.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Hultgren, 'The history of violence against those whom God has sent throughout history is underscored vividly. Violence against Jesus, the Son of God, is one more instance of that history'. Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary*, 368.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Grindheim, who notes that, while Jesus functions as a prophet in his role as messenger and subsequent martyrdom, the relationship of the son to the father/owner distinguishes the son from the servants. Sigurd Grindheim, *Christology in the Synoptic Gospels: God Or God's Servant* (London: T&T Clark, 2012), 68.

<sup>64</sup> Stern considers the 'beloved son' to be John the Baptist, killed by Herod in Mk 6.14-29. This would contextually fit with the prior instruction concerning the authority of John the Baptist, but the suggestion is highly unlikely. Nowhere in the Markan narrative is John addressed as a beloved son: Mark reserves this title for Jesus alone. Additionally, the death of John the Baptist is not a communal decision, as in the parable, but the choice of a single man. David Stern, 'Jesus' Parables from the Perspective of Rabbinic Literature: The Example of the

term of special significance within the Markan narrative.<sup>65</sup> At his baptism the divine voice addresses Jesus as its beloved son (σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, Mk. 1.11) and again at the transfiguration the disciples are told to listen to Jesus, God's beloved son (ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, Mk. 9.7). Though the Jewish leaders addressed by Jesus were not present for either occasion, within the narrative it is clear that the beloved son of the parable is intended to be understood as Jesus and a description of his identity.<sup>66</sup> If Jesus is the son of the divine voice from heaven, who is this voice? The parable speaks of the owner of the vineyard as the κύριος of the vineyard, a double entendre that recalls Isaiah 5.7 (ὁ ἀμπελὼν κυρίου σαβαώθ) and God's personal name YHWH in the LXX.<sup>67</sup> Jesus is similar to a prophet in function, but by claiming to have a heavenly, divine origin as the Son of YHWH Jesus suggests he is ontologically distinct from the prophets.<sup>68</sup> Jesus of Nazareth has been sent by God, his Father, to the people of Israel to prophetically receive from the people their works of justice.

Jesus answers a question concerning the origin and nature of his authority by claiming for himself a divine origin. His authority derives 'from heaven' by virtue of his sonship and he speaks on behalf of his Father, YHWH. The parable could have ended here and would have been an adequate answer to the Jewish leaders' questions. But it continues to prophetically outline the remainder of Jesus' earthly life. As with the son of the parable, Jesus will likewise be rejected by the Jewish leaders and killed. This rejection will prompt God to destroy the leaders and delegate the oversight of his people to others. Here, the world of the parable and the real world of the Markan narrative mirror one another. Jesus' rejection by the Jewish leaders and their crucifixion of him mimics the tenants' rejection and murder of the son, as do the responses of God and the owner. As in the parable, the Jewish leaders' rejection of Jesus is

---

Wicked Husbandmen,' in *Studies in Judaism and Christianity*, ed. C. Thoma and M. Wyschogrod (New York: Paulist Press, 1989).

<sup>65</sup> A point overlooked by Snodgrass, who translates ἀγαπητός as 'only'. Klyne Snodgrass, *The Parable of the Wicked Tenants*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament (Tübingen: J C B Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1983), 49.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Tolbert, 'the description of the heir as "a beloved son" (12:6) recalls Jesus alone, for the voice from heaven has twice called him beloved son (1:11; 9:7). Thus, both his position and his identity distinguish him from all the previous messengers, including John the Baptist. He is one of the types but at the same time different from the rest'. Tolbert, *Sowing the Word: Mark's World in Literary Historical Perspective*, 238-39. See also Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, ed. Harold W. Attridge, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 547.

<sup>67</sup> Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 804-05.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Gathercole, '[T]he parable of the wicked tenants makes it clear Jesus cannot adequately be described in prophetic categories, and that his sending is not simply the sending of a prophet. The character of the "son" points to the identity of Jesus as "the Son," a central aspect of which is his heavenly identity'. Simon Gathercole, *The Pre-existent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 189. A similar contrast between the role of Israel's prophets and Jesus' own prophetic role is made in Hebrews 1.1-2.

revealed to be their own undoing. The owner/God takes the ‘vineyard’ and gives it to ‘others’, likely an opaque nod to the Gentile mission.<sup>69</sup> And while the parable ends only with this negative indictment of the tenants, Jesus’ own speech continues to make clear that the death of the son will not be in vain and he will be vindicated. In an overt reference to his upcoming resurrection, Jesus cites Psalm 118.22 (117.22 LXX) to both condemn the leaders who reject him and reaffirm his supreme authority. The builders mistakenly rejected (killed) the stone of greatest importance for the construction of a building. That which appears to the Jewish leaders to be folly is the very advent of their salvation. The parable is therefore both a defense of Jesus’ authority and an indictment against the Jewish leaders who reject him. Jesus is the climax of Israel’s history and acceptance/rejection of him is the standard by which all are judged.

## 2.5. The Not-so Secret Divine Christology

Mark’s Gospel narrates the apocalyptic advent of Jesus and the good news of salvation. It is the story of the revelation of the Son of God to the people of Israel for the salvation of the world. Within the broader Markan narrative, this parable assumes supreme importance beyond the question of the origin and nature of Jesus’ authority, with significant implications for Markan Christology and the so-called secrecy theme. As noted above, Jesus is twice spoken of as the beloved son of a divine voice (1.11, 9.7), and the description of the son of the owner as a beloved son demands that this son of the parable be identified as Jesus himself. Yet Mark strategically employs this ‘Son of God’ designation at several other key points within the narrative. The very beginning of the gospel opens by stating that the work is ‘Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ υἱοῦ θεοῦ’.<sup>70</sup> As the introduction to the text, the description of

---

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Iverson, ‘Jews, Gentiles, and the Kingdom of God: the Parable of the Wicked Tenants in Narrative Perspective (Mark 12:1-12).’; Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 805; Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News According to Mark*, trans. Donald H. Madvig (London: SPCK, 1971), 241.

<sup>70</sup> There is a textual issue with this reading, since ⲭ\*, Θ, 28.1, 2211, the Sahidic Coptic tradition, and Origen all omit υἱοῦ θεοῦ. There are a number of issues debated surrounding this variant reading and which one might be original. The shorter reading may be an instance of homoioteleuton between Χριστοῦ and θεοῦ, while the longer reading would be an apt expansion of the Markan motif into the text’s introduction, possibly to hedge off an adoptionist reading of Mark. The shorter reading is primarily attested by Caesarean texts, though a few additional witnesses originate from Alexandria. An analysis of the more original form is further complicated by the varied abbreviations employed by scribes for Ἰησοῦ, Χριστοῦ, υἱοῦ, and θεοῦ. Ehrman argues that an accidental omission of υἱοῦ θεοῦ is more unlikely at the beginning of text, but he does not offer a counter explanation as to the widespread attestation of the longer reading. Instead, he presumes that the widely distributed scribes would have each independently lengthened the shorter reading because they all wished to avoid an adoptionist reading of Mark. Were this true, the broad uniformity of the expansion would be surprisingly well coordinated. Moreover, Ehrman’s theological logic for the change is itself flimsy, asserting the contradictory

Jesus as God's Son foregrounds the reader's expectations for Jesus' identity. But despite this prominent placement, the term is not defined or further explained. This ambiguity has spurred some to suggest that 'Son of God' was a readily understood Christological title within first century Judaism or Christianity and Mark's usage here conforms to this conventional connotation.<sup>71</sup> Such a historical reconstruction is certainly plausible, but in practice this approach discards the text of Mark itself in favor of other texts' more plain explanations. Instead, at this point in the narrative Mark seems to leave the precise meaning of 'Son of God' intentionally open. In doing so, he allows the narrative depiction of Jesus to elucidate this initially opaque term.

As the narrative proceeds from its mysteriously vague beginnings, Jesus teaches, heals, and casts out demons, and though the question of Jesus' identity is posed several times it is never directly answered. The divine voice at Jesus' baptism is addressed to Jesus himself and no indication is given if this is heard by anyone else. Jesus is acclaimed to be the son of David (Mk. 10.47-48), but Mark seems to be ambivalent toward this characterization (12.35-37).<sup>72</sup> Peter confesses Jesus as the Christ (Mk. 8.29), an echo of Jesus' title in 1.1, yet Peter's rebuke of Jesus' passion prediction seems to undermine Peter's understanding of his prior confession. Only the demons rightly note Jesus' divine sonship (Mk. 3.11, 5.7). Prior to the parable of the tenants, if Mark has informed the reader that Jesus is the 'Son of God', no earthly person seems to recognize him as such. Compounding this mystery is Jesus' own repeated prohibitions against individuals telling other about Jesus' actions. It is this tension between the privileged knowledge of the reader and the limited Christological reflection within the narrative which substantiates what is called the Messianic Secret motif.<sup>73</sup> Prior to Jesus' telling of the parable of

---

positions that 'Son of God' is ambiguous in Mark and that it was so theologically freighted that scribes were compelled to alter the text to exclude heresy. Finally, the textual critical preference for the shorter reading cannot be inferred, given the later concern to avoid conflict with the imperial cult (though it is not necessarily in view for Mark) as well as the common Patristic practice of contracting gospel incipits, and this passage in particular. Weighing the plausibility of an accidental omission against the widespread lengthening of a shorter text, the former is more likely to have occurred, especially given the longer reading's extremely close affinity with Markan Christology. Bart D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 72-75; Alexander Globe, "The Caesarean Omission of the Phrase "Son of God" in Mark 1:1," *Harvard Theological Review* 75, no. 2 (1982); Tommy Wasserman, "The "Son of God" was in the Beginning," *Journal of Theological Studies* 62, no. 1 (2011).

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Adela Yarbro Collins, 'Mark and His Readers: The Son of God among Jews,' *Harvard Theological Review* 92, no. 4 (1999).

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Joel Marcus, 'Identity and Ambiguity in Markan Christology,' in *Seeking the Identity of Jesus, a Pilgrimage*, ed. Beverly Roberts Gaventa and Richard B. Hays (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 136-40.

<sup>73</sup> For more on the messianic secret, see: Bultmann, *Theology Vol. 1*, 32.; James D. G. Dunn, 'The Messianic Secret in Mark,' in *The Messianic Secret*, ed. C. M. Tuckett (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).; Heikki Räisänen, *Messianic Secret in Mark's Gospel*, trans. C. M. Tuckett (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994).;

the tenants, it is not altogether clear what Mark implies by his preferred designation, 'Son of God'. It seems to have Davidic, kingly, overtones but these are not elaborated by Mark, nor are they understood by Jesus' audience. Rather than a Christological ambiguity reflected in Mark's own indifference,<sup>74</sup> this ambiguity seems to be a function of his secrecy motif. Mark intentionally conceals Jesus' earthly audiences from understanding his true identity.

If the Markan narrative proceeds in a way that conceals Jesus' identity from those around him, this cannot be said of his telling of the parable of the tenants. Unlike any other portion of the gospel, here Mark definitively reveals Jesus' identity to his Jewish opponents and simultaneously explains definitely what he means by the designation 'Son of God'.<sup>75</sup> Many commentators have failed to see the parable's Christological implications<sup>76</sup>, but through the parable Jesus claims to be none other than the son of YHWH, the God of Israel, sent from heaven to prophetically judge the nation and fall victim to its long history of rebellion.<sup>77</sup> By

---

William R. Telford, *The Theology of the Gospel of Mark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 54.; Theodore J. Weeden, 'The Heresy that Necessitated Mark's Gospel [1968],' in *The Interpretation of Mark*, ed. William R. Telford (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1985).; William Wrede, *The Messianic Secret*, trans. J.C.G. Greig (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1971).

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Trocmé, who argues that Mark incorporates disparate material without asserting a distinctive position. E. Trocmé, 'Is there a Markan Christology,' in *Christ and the Spirit in the New Testament. In Honour of Charles Francis Digby Moule*, ed. B. Lindars and S. S. Smalley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973).

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Grindheim, 'Spoken in the temple (11.27), the parable is Jesus' first public proclamation of himself as the Son of God'. Grindheim, *Christology in the Synoptic Gospels: God Or God's Servant*, 68. It follows that Mark is not ambiguous in its Christology, and cannot so easily be read in an adoptionist manner, as suggested by Ehrman. Whatever ambiguity might have existed prior to the parable of the tenants is resolved as the parable illuminates the prior narrative as well as informing future events. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament*, 74.

<sup>76</sup> The parable of the tenants is commonly omitted in discussion about Mark's Son of God title. Cf. Norman Perrin, 'The Christology of Mark: a Study of Methodology (1971, 1974),' in *The Interpretation of Mark*, ed. William R. Telford (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985); Telford, *The Theology of the Gospel of Mark*, 38-39. And most surprisingly, given his narrative approach, Herbert W. I. V. Bateman, 'Defining the Titles "Christ" and "Son of God" in Mark's Narrative Presentation of Jesus,' *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50, no. 3 (2007).

<sup>77</sup> It follows that 'Son of God' cannot be understood as reflective of a novel Gentile-Christian Christological confession, as first suggested by Bousset and followed by numerous subsequent interpreters who search for the origin of this term in early Christianity. Cf. Bousset, 'For now it is shown on the other hand that where the title "Son of God" comes to undisputed dominance, that is, in the area of popular conceptions in the Gentile Christian church and in that of the Pauline-Johannine Christology, there are bound up with it conceptions of a kind in part primitively mythological, in part speculatively metaphysical; and these simply have nothing more to do with Jewish-primitive Christian messianology'. Wilhelm Bousset, *Kyrios Christos: A History of the Belief in Christ from the Beginnings of Christianity to Irenaeus*, trans. John E. Steely, 5th ed. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1970), 97. For an application of Bousset's Jewish-Hellenistic Christian divide to the parable, see Werner Georg Kümmel, 'Das Gleichnis von den bösen Weingärtnern (Mk 12,1-9),' in *Heilsgeschehen und Geschichte: Gesammelte Aufsätze, 1933-1964* (Marburg: Elwert, 1965). See also Weeden, 'The Heresy that Necessitated Mark's Gospel [1968]'. The firmly Jewish character of Mark's Son of God Christology is to be maintained regardless of whether the term could have been understood by Markan readers according to a Greek/Stoic concept of a divine man. This is the position of Adela Yarbro Collins, who overlooks the evidence of the parable of the tenants and its Isaiah allusions. Adela Yarbro Collins, 'Mark and His Readers: The Son of God among Greeks and Romans,' *Harvard Theological Review* 93, no. 2 (2000). Additionally, if the term, 'Son of



being subject to this salvation-history murderous rejection, Jesus is paradoxically revealed to be the chief cornerstone. The address to Jesus in his baptism as God's beloved son may then be understood as the inauguration of the son's visitation to his vineyard, Israel. The ministry of Jesus in its entirety is as an extended dramatization of the son of the parable. The demons rightly recognize Jesus' heavenly origin because they also originate from the heavenly realm. At the transfiguration, the divine voice entreats the disciples to only listen to Jesus because Jesus acts as God's representative and the salvation-historical overtones evinced by the presence of Moses and Elijah can be explained by the parable's assertion that the ministry of Jesus occurs in these 'last' times.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, this divine voice from heaven, appearing also in the baptism, discloses Jesus' divine identity and origin—the very question posed to him by the Jewish leaders in Mark 11.28. Looking forward, the question by the high priest that Jesus is the son of the blessed one (Mk. 14.61) reflects a familiarity and understanding of the parable of the tenants.<sup>79</sup> Likewise, the centurion's confession of Jesus' divine sonship immediately after Jesus' death on the cross is the first and only faithful response to Jesus in the gospel.<sup>80</sup> These disclosures of Jesus' identity are retrospectively and prospectively interpreted by the parable of the tenants as the realization of Jesus' prophetic and divine claim. Moreover, the confession by the centurion is not the moment that the secrecy of Jesus' identity is finally divulged, but the time when his identity is properly received in a confession of faith. Jesus himself already let the 'secrecy cat' out of the bag three chapters earlier when he described himself as the Son of God, and Mark plainly shows that this message was understood by the Jewish leaders, 'ἐγνώσαν γὰρ ὅτι πρὸς αὐτοὺς τὴν παραβολὴν εἶπεν' (Mk. 12.12). Like the tenants of the parable,

---

God', necessarily implies for some scholars an association with Psalm 2 and a Messianic-kingly status, this is conspicuously absent from the parable. Such an absence either indicates a gap between the parable and Mark's own Christology, or, in my view, suggests that an explicit reference to Psalm 2 and the Messianic-kingly status of Jesus is not in view when the title is employed by Mark and rather espouses something of an 'incipient Trinitarianism' which Wright eschews in favor of Jesus' representative, kingly status. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 485-86.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Watson, 'The disciples are to listen to him alone and exclusively; only when they have learned to do that can they understand the true significance of Moses, Elijah and the holy history of Israel as preparing the way of the Lord'. Francis Watson, *Text and Truth: Redefining Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 85.

<sup>79</sup> As noted by Snodgrass, *The Parable of the Wicked Tenants*, 99.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Marcus, 'Identity and Ambiguity in Markan Christology,' 147. Pace Johnson, who considers the anarthrous confession to be a reflection of the Roman centurion's Roman religious background (Jesus was a son of God), but this cannot be inferred given the narrational trajectory of Mark. E. S. Johnson, 'Mark 15,39 and the So-Called Confession of the Roman Centurion,' *Biblica* 81, no. 3 (2000).

the Jewish leaders recognize the identity of the one sent to them (ἐστὶν ὁ κληρονόμος, Mk. 12.7) and they similarly vow to find a way to dispose of Jesus.<sup>81</sup>

As a function of its placement within the broader narrative of Mark, the parable assumes the centerpiece of Jesus' teaching about himself as the decisive revelation of his true identity. For the purposes of this study it is important to note that it is the narrative context which exerts a hermeneutical pressure upon the parable to render it in such a distinctive Christological manner.<sup>82</sup> In many ways, the parable is a summary of the gospel as a whole.<sup>83</sup> From its use of the term 'Son of God' to Jesus' rejection and eventual death and resurrection, the events of the parable and the events of Jesus' life so closely coincide that a Christological interpretation is unavoidable. This is all the more remarkable when one considers the paucity of distinctly Christological teaching in the gospel. The parable of the tenants breaks convention with the rest of Mark's secrecy theme to form the center point of Jesus' teachings about himself. The gospel can be said to be a story of the revelation of the Son of God, from its mysterious, uncertain beginnings to its critical climax at the cross. Mark discloses Jesus' identity by employing Christological titles at key places within his narration of the events of Jesus' life. These are not opposed, but mutually interpret one another to form a single perspective on Jesus' life and significance. It is the surrounding narrative which highlights Mark's Christological interpretation of the parable, which in turn reflects backwards upon the events of the narrative to interpret the ministry and death of Jesus. The parable of the tenants is swept up into the wider Markan narrative so convincingly that some of the original circumstances of Jesus' utterances are almost entirely left behind. Having placed the question of Christology at the fore of his gospel and therefore the parable, it is easily forgotten that the Jewish leaders' question about the origin and nature of Jesus' authority has been occasioned by his actions in the temple. If the Jewish leaders were furious over Jesus' judgment of the current temple practice, this issue has given way to the more pressing question of Christology. It does not seem to be necessary, or important, for Jesus to defend his actions as much as reveal his identity.

---

<sup>81</sup> Pace Snodgrass, who suggests that the Jewish leaders might have understood the parable to be spoken against oppressive foreign powers who killed God's representatives. Snodgrass, *The Parable of the Wicked Tenants*, 77-78.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Grindheim, 'in the narrative context, the Son of God title has been established as the most authoritative title for Jesus... The narrative has also established Jesus as the one who appears in the role of God, yet is subordinate to him. In this narrative context, it may be warranted to see in the parable's son a metaphor that is able to explain the unique relationship between Jesus and God'. Grindheim, *Christology in the Synoptic Gospels: God Or God's Servant*, 68.

<sup>83</sup> E. van Eck and A. G. van Aarde, 'A Narratological Analysis of Mark 12:1-12: The Plot of the Gospel of Mark in a Nutshell,' *HTS Teologiese Studies* 45, no. 4 (1989).

## 2.6. Thomas and Mark

Comparing Mark with Thomas, one is struck by their drastically different renderings of the same parable. Yet despite this radical variation, both Thomas and Mark have offered genuine readings of the parable, utilizing alternate potentialities inherent in the parable while overlooking others. Thomas has a more 'literal' and simpler form than Mark, but this does not suggest he is closer to the truth of the parable, only that he has deeply imbibed only one aspect of the parable's metaphorical world. Mark exploits the temporal succession entailed by the succession of servants to position Jesus' telling of the parable within a wider salvation-historical framework. Just as God sent a stream of prophets to Israel, so the owner sent servant after servant to the vineyard. This emphasis on Christology and salvation-history occurs in Mark to the detriment of Thomas' ethical theme. For Thomas, this very same succession of servants/son is developed to show the increasing greed/violence of the tenants. Whereas Mark believes the vineyard to be a metaphor for Israel, Thomas sees it as a metaphor for the worldly sphere of economic gain. Yet in each case the sending of servants frames the readers' expectations of what will happen when the son is sent to the rebellious tenants. Both versions of the parable reach their climactic conclusion with the sending of the son. For Thomas, however, the son's identity as the heir of the vineyard assumes supreme importance to reveal the avarice of the tenants. Comparatively, the son's status as heir is largely overlooked in Mark in favor of the son's filial relation to the father. So while the form of the parable is largely the same in both Thomas and Mark, they offer wildly divergent interpretations. This does not imply an absolute plurality of meanings for the parable of the tenants: for example, it would be inconceivable to identify Jesus with the tenants of the vineyard. Instead, a parable offers the interpreters of Mark and Thomas a range of possibilities bound by the freedom and limitations of its finite imagery.

Turning to the Gospel of Matthew, much of Mark's interpretation and setting for the parable of the tenants is integrated into his narrative and further extrapolated into a fuller account of salvation history.<sup>84</sup> Matthew both repeats Mark while also deepening its essential

---

<sup>84</sup> This, of course, assumes that Matthew has received his parable from Mark, rather than from an independent source, as suggested by Robinson, who considers Matthew to represent a pre-synoptic version of the parable, and Kretzer, who argues for the hypothetical Q document as a source on the basis of the minor agreement between Luke and Matthew at Verse 44. Armin Kretzer, *Die Herrschaft der Himmel und die Söhne des Reiches: eine redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zum Basileiabegriff und Basileiaverständnis im Matthäus-evangelium*, vol. 10, Stuttgarter Biblische Monographien (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1971), 163-64; J. A. T. Robinson, 'The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen: A Test Case of Synoptic Relationships,' *New Testament Studies* 21, no. 4 (1975). But, as shown below, these suggestions overlook that at several of the

themes. Thus far this study has resisted delving into the tradition history of each parable to note its dependence upon other texts, but to avoid doing so here would lead to a great deal of unnecessary repetition. So convincing is Mark's rendering of the parable that Matthew feels little need to alter much of its contents, yet its placement within a broader narrative undoubtedly raises new interpretive possibilities unforeseen by Mark. Therefore Matthew will be examined initially as a recipient and interpreter of the Markan parable and will then proceed to assess the parable's place within the wider narrative.

### 3. The Christological Parable of the Tenants, Version 2.0

#### 3.1. General Features of the Matthean Parable

In its overall form, many of the essential features of the Markan parable are retained by Matthew. The description of the vineyard and its construction maintain the Isaiah references, bringing it into stronger conformity with the LXX of Isaiah 5.2.<sup>85</sup> But rather than sending a consecutive string of servants as with Mark and Thomas, the Matthean parable features the sending of two groups of servants. An initial group is sent and they are beaten, killed and stoned by the tenants. A second group of servants is sent, this time larger than the first, and they are likewise beaten, killed, and stoned. Omitting Mark's unique designation of the son as the last of the owner's representatives as well as the description of the son as beloved, Matthew more closely identifies the son with the previous group of servants, sent later (ὕστερον) by the owner. As in Thomas, the tenants first see the son, recognizing him as the heir, and plot to kill him in order to gain ownership of the vineyard. Yet instead of Thomas and Mark's unceremonious murder of the son, Matthew records that the son is first taken (λαβόντες), cast out of the vineyard (ἐξέβαλον ἔξω τοῦ ἀμπελῶνος), and killed. Mark's rhetorical question concerning the fate of the tenants then becomes a question answered by Jesus' Jewish opponents, who respond with a more vivid judgment. The tenants are now evil ones (κακοί) whom the owner will evilly destroy (κακῶς ἀπολέσει). In place of the deceased tenants, the owner will give the vineyard to new farmers who Matthew uniquely stipulates will give to him his fruit in their harvests. As in Mark, Jesus continues the parable by quoting from Psalm

---

points of difference from Mark there are Matthean redactional themes. For example, Matthew has thrice added καρποί, a common motif within Matthew (Cf. 7.16-20, 12.33).

<sup>85</sup> Matthew has added ἐν αὐτῷ and altered the ordering of the vineyard. W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, III vols., vol. III (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 179.

117/118.22-23. The Matthean Jesus then underscores the meaning of the parable by adding the conclusion in 21.43 to concretely connect the parable with the wider narrative. The kingdom of God (the vineyard) will be taken from the chief priests, elders, and Pharisees (the tenants) and given to a people (other tenants) producing fruits of it. While those who fall over the stone (reject the son) will, like the tenants, be destroyed by the son himself.<sup>86</sup>

### 3.2. Jesus' Rejected Authority: The Immediate Setting of the Matthean Parable

Compared to Mark, the setting Matthew has enlisted for the parable of the tenants is quite similar. In both, the same sequence of events is maintained: triumphal entry, temple cleansing, fig tree, disputation with the Jewish leaders and Matthew's parable of the tenants falls within this extended discourse with the chief priest and the elders concerning Jesus' authority. As with Mark, the parable of the tenants is directed to these Jewish interlocutors in response to their questions and its meaning is directed exclusively to them.

But more broadly, a number of smaller alterations have been made by Matthew to draw out his particular emphases. The chronology of the narrative has altered Mark's passion timeline so that the cleansing of the temple is not anti-climactically divided by a day, but follows immediately upon Jesus' arrival as a single action by Jesus; the triumphant king comes in judgment against the temple. So while in Mark the chief priests are angered at Jesus' quotation of Isaiah 56.7 against the temple (Mk. 11.17), for Matthew they are indignant because of his actions/teaching in the temple and the children's continued singing, 'Hosanna to the Son of David'. When the chief priests and elders of the people approach Jesus for questioning on the following day, he is already teaching in the Temple and they appear to interrupt him. They ask by what authority he does these things (ταῦτα), a question which likely includes his entry into Jerusalem, his cleansing of the temple, his healing in 21.15, as well as his present teaching. Jesus has already been reported by Matthew as one who teaches with

---

<sup>86</sup> Despite the wide attestation of 21.44 in the textual tradition (txt B C L W Z (Θ) et. al—only D, sy<sup>a</sup>, and some Old Italian MSS omit it), Davies and Allison consider this verse to be an assimilation to Luke 20 primarily because otherwise 'one would almost be forced to infer literary dependence of Luke upon Matthew'. By contrast, for Luz, 'the textual evidence is overwhelmingly strong, so that it is impossible for me to eliminate the verse as a later gloss'. In my estimation, Allison's evidence against inclusion reverses the standard practice of textual criticism. An appeal to a large-scale paradigm such as the two-source theory is only helpful if the external and internal evidence is inconclusive. Conversely, the verse is more readily explained by the Farrer hypothesis and since it is both well attested and suitably fits within Matthean theology, I see little reason for its exclusion. Davies and Allison, *Commentary on Matthew XIX-XXVIII*, 186; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28: A Commentary*, ed. Helmut Koester, trans. James E. Crouch (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 36. For a convincing comparison of this verse with Lukan and Matthean redactional tendencies, see Goulder, *Luke: A New Paradigm*, 695-96.

authority (Mt. 7.29, 9.6) and so a question on the nature and origin of his authority is likely anticipated.<sup>87</sup> Jesus' answer follows much of Mark's text, but Matthew includes an additional parable, the parable of the two sons, comparing the repentance of the tax collectors and prostitutes in response to John's message with the Jewish leaders' own failure to repent. The additional parable adeptly bridges the gap between the question concerning John the Baptist and the subsequent parable by further stressing the Jewish leader's rejection of John, one resulting in their disbarment from the kingdom of God (Mt. 21.31). As in Mark, the parable then ensues with the expectation that it will address the question of Jesus' authority, but the new Matthean context also highlights the parable of the tenants' themes of rejection and judgment.

### 3.3. The Parable of the Tenants: From Judaism to Christianity?

In each of Matthew's alterations to his Markan source Matthew demonstrates his indebtedness to the Markan version of the parable while altering and expanding its salvation-historical emphases along a broadly common trajectory. As noted above, Matthew has slightly altered the Markan citation of Isaiah 5 to bring it into greater conformity with the LXX. By doing so, Matthew emphatically endorses and furthers the Isaiah context for the parable and its salvation-historical implications. The foundation of the parable coincides with the history of Israel and the sending of servants represents God's sending of prophets to Israel. But this similarity underscores Matthew's own distinct additions.

While the vineyard in Mark represents the nation of Israel and the status of God's people, the vineyard in Matthew is identified as the 'kingdom of God' (Mt. 21.43), a phrase tantamount to the more common βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν<sup>88</sup> representing God's temporal/spatial reign. If for Mark the status of Israel as God's people can be transferred to others, Matthew's generalization more readily accommodates this transmission without the

---

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Repschinski, 'Jesus, then, riles the opponents by doing what they ought to be doing. He lodges his temple protest, and accuses them of having changed it from the house of God into a den of thieves. He heals in the temple, and it becomes an occasion for Jesus to expose their lack of knowledge of the scriptures. And now he teaches in the temple'. Boris Repschinski, *The Controversy Stories in the Gospel of Matthew: their Redaction, Form and Relevance for the Relationship Between the Matthean Community and Formative Judaism* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 196.

<sup>88</sup> For a summary of scholarship on Matthew's occasional use of βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ see, Jonathan T. Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew*, ed. M.M. Mitchell and D.P. Moessner, vol. 126, Supplements to Novum Testamentum (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 303-10. He cogently concludes that Matthew uses both the 'kingdom of heavens' and 'kingdom of God' to refer to the same reality, while having slightly different literary nuances. In our passage, its usage strongly refers back to its occurrence in 21.31, which similarly suggests that the Jewish leaders will be shut out of the Kingdom and others will be included in the fold.

somewhat obscure redefinition of what the term ‘Israel’ entails. Matthew’s ‘kingdom of God’ coheres with Mark’s own ecclesiological understanding of the vineyard—God’s reign is undoubtedly directed toward his people—while also relating it to Jesus’ broader ministry within the Gospel of Matthew. And so Matthew suggests that the vineyard represents the locus of God’s activity and those who have entered into that kingdom. It was founded by God in the election of the Jewish people so that they might produce for God the fruits of justice and righteousness (Is. 5.7).

To the kingdom of God the owner sends two groups of servants, the second larger than the first. The depiction of the treatment of these servants parallels Jesus’ lament in 23.37 over the maltreatment of the prophets by Jerusalem, who ‘kills [ἀποκτείνουσα] and stones [λιθοβολοῦσα] those who are sent [ἀπεσταλμένους] to her’. In an adept recapitulation of Israel’s history, the two groups of servants represent the prophets sent by God to Israel. But instead of an endless succession of prophets symbolizing perpetual disobedience, the sequence of two groups of prophets possibly mirrors the early and later prophets of Israel’s history,<sup>89</sup> suffering increasing hostility at the hands of the servants (ἔδειραν, ἀπέκτειναν, ἐλιθοβόλησαν). From its very beginning the kingdom of God has suffered violence by those violent men who kill God’s representatives and seize it for themselves (Mt. 11.12). The owner then sends his son, thinking that they will be put to shame by his arrival. The son is not a beloved son (υἱός ἀγαπητός) or the last of the owner’s emissaries, as in Mark, but is more simply said to be sent later (ὕστερος).<sup>90</sup> Mark’s distinctive Christological marker is omitted to more closely identify the son with the mission of the prior prophets, though he remains distinct from them by virtue of his filial relation to the owner, YHWH. Similar to the Markan source, the tenants recognize the son as the heir and conspire to kill him to gain sole ownership of the vineyard. The son is first cast out of the vineyard (ἐξέβαλον ἔξω τοῦ ἀμπελῶνος, 21.39) before he is killed by the tenants, reflecting later events in the Matthean narrative where Jesus is lead away (ἀπάγω, 27.31) and travels out (ἐξέρχομαι, 27.32) from the city to be

---

<sup>89</sup> Cf. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 72; Scott, *Hear Then the Parable: A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus*, 241. On this division, Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings belong to the former prophets, while Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the book of the Twelve are latter prophets. This grouping follows the sequence of Jesus’ argumentation in Matt. 12.1-7, moving from early prophets (12.3-4), to the law (12.5-6) and the latter prophets (12.7). R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 458. Though, given the sparseness of the detail some caution is warranted, as noted by Luz. Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 40.

<sup>90</sup> An appropriate account as to why Matthew has altered Mark in this way is not immediately apparent, especially since Matthew includes other instances of ἀγαπητός υἱός (Mt. 3.17, 17.5) and records an additional reference at Mt. 12.18. The omission of Jesus as the last (ἔσχατος) of God’s representatives does clarify the odd possible implication in Mark that the son was only sent after the father exhausted his supply of prophets.

crucified.<sup>91</sup> The history of Israel and its consistent pattern of rebellion has tragically led to the murder of the son of God.

As in Mark, the results of this miscalculation are disastrous for the tenants, but as noted above Matthew has further emphasized the immorality of the tenants and more vividly depicted their dreadful fate. While Mark simply states that the owner will destroy the tenants (ἀπολέσει, Mk. 12.9), Matthew colorfully adds that the owner will evilly destroy (κακῶς ἀπολέσει) those evil men (κακοῦς, Mt. 21.41). If the previous mistreatment of the prophets was patiently tolerated by God, the killing of his son is the tipping point of Israel's 'salvation' history. Their sin was not performed in ignorance, but by recognizing the son for who he is the tenants knowingly committed an offense in direct opposition to God. Consequently, the vineyard/kingdom of God will be taken from the tenants and given to other tenants who will give the owner its fruits. Matthew further clarifies the somewhat open question in Mark of who these are tenants are. They are another nation/people (ἔθνος), a word with reference to either the Gentiles or the nations in general.<sup>92</sup> This opens the lively, and much debated, issue of supersessionism. Has the history of Israel culminated in the appearance of Jesus, only to have this history end with this culmination?

The crux of this issue hinges on the identity of the addressees of the parable, the people from whom the kingdom of God is to be taken. The parable is spoken to Jewish leaders, in Matthew's case the chief priests and elders of the people, but the transfer of the vineyard to another people appears to entails more corporate realities. Some, such as David Flusser, have understood Matthew's parable of the tenants in highly nationalistic terms, with the Gentiles replacing the Jews in the kingdom of God.<sup>93</sup> Linking the killing of the tenants with Matthew's earlier statements of retributive eschatological judgment, Israel necessarily forfeits its election. Because of its guilt, Israel has been replaced by the Gentiles, the new people of God. Flusser strongly opposes this 'vulgar anti-Judaism'<sup>94</sup> which is 'only loosely connected with the gist of

---

<sup>91</sup> Cf. Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom*, 71.

<sup>92</sup> Several times in Matthew ἔθνος unambiguously implies the Gentiles in contradistinction to the Jews (4.12, 6.32, 10.5, 20.19, and 20.25). On other occasions (10.18, 12.18, 12.21, 24.14, 25.32, 28.19) ἔθνος refers to 'the nations' as the global, worldwide scope of divine action.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. Flusser, 'those from whom the kingdom of God will be taken are identical with Israel, "the sons of the kingdom" who will be excluded from it and thrown into hell (Mt. 8:12). They are contrasted with the nation to whom the kingdom will be given, namely the Gentile Christians'. David Flusser, *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1988), 558. See also Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 70. This supersessionist interpretation has been the dominant one for much of Christian history. See, for example, Irenaeus, "Adversus Haereses," 4.36.2.

<sup>94</sup> Flusser, *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity*, 559.



Christian belief and in many ways contradicts Christian values'.<sup>95</sup> Flusser's reading of the parable is similar to that of Graham Stanton, who situates the meaning of the parable within the contemporary Matthean community and its separation from Judaism.<sup>96</sup> The parable is directed against Judaism in its entirety, which has rejected both the prophets and the appeals of the Christian community.<sup>97</sup> While Flusser and Stanton rightly note the corporate implications of Jesus' interpretation of the parable, they do so by ignoring the immediate setting of the parable. The parable avoids their hasty generalizations and is told against very specific leaders: chief priests, elders, and Pharisees. As noted by Anthony Saldarini:

Jesus' opponents in the Gospel narrative are not symbolic of Jews in general nor of Israel as a corporate entity, but of the leaders of the Jewish community in both Jesus' and Matthew's time. In numerous cases the opponents of Jesus are identified as specific leadership groups, most often the scribes and Pharisees in Galilee and the chief priests and elders in Jerusalem.<sup>98</sup>

Matthew has selected the audience for Jesus' teaching according to the desired scope of his polemic. Jesus does not address a Jewish crowd at large, but the Jewish leaders who confront Jesus about the origin and nature of his authority. This results in a much more nuanced account of the parable's meaning and its implications for salvation history. But for Saldarini, the parable of the tenants is *only* aimed at the negligent chief priests and Pharisees: 'the leaders of the Jewish community are losing their ruling power because of malfeasance, and they are being replaced by a group (*ethnos*) of leaders who do listen to God and can guide the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" (10.6)'.<sup>99</sup> Jesus institutes a regime change, deposing the old leadership and replacing them with others who are more agreeable to his mission. On this reading, the Matthean Christians understood themselves as, 'a reformist Jewish sect seeking influence and power (relatively unsuccessfully within the Jewish community as a whole)'.<sup>100</sup> Matthew's critique of other Jewish leaders represents an *intra muros* debate between Jewish

---

<sup>95</sup> Flusser, *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity*, 573.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. Stanton, for whom the parable is 'the clearest indication in the gospel that the Matthean community saw itself as a separate and quite distinct entity over against Judaism'. G. N. Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), 150.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. Stanton, 'The first set of servants refers to the prophets sent to Israel. The second set of servants is the equivalent of 'the stone rejected by the builders' of 21.42. They are servants in the new era: Christian prophets and messengers who are seized, treated shamefully, and killed (22.6)'. Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew*, 153. See also Wright, where the rejected stone is 'the new community of the people of YHWH'. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 499.

<sup>98</sup> Anthony J. Saldarini, 'Boundaries and Polemics in the Gospel of Matthew,' *Biblical Interpretation* 3, no. 3 (1995), 246.

<sup>99</sup> Anthony J. Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 62-63.

<sup>100</sup> Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community*, 198. See also Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 304.

groups on the status of Jesus of Nazareth and his role in salvation-history.<sup>101</sup> Rather than understanding Judaism as a monolithic entity, this differentiated view of Israel makes the most sense of the Matthean setting for the parable. The parable of the tenants is not a wholesale rejection of Judaism or a debate between two distinct religions, but an *intra muros* debate within Judaism on its identity in light of Jesus and his role within salvation-history. Yet, Saldarini blunts the force of Jesus' polemic, especially in light of 21.44, and, as will be shown below, resides uncomfortably within Jesus' broader critique of the Judaisms of his day. As with Mark, there is an insoluble link between the failure of the leaders and the people who follow them in their folly.<sup>102</sup> Instead, the 'entire holy nation' (Mt. 21.25) is not exempt from their poor choice of leadership and Jesus' critique is, by extension, leveled against them as well, as noted by Luz and Olmstead.<sup>103</sup>

For Matthew, Jesus comes within Israel's history as its climactic defining moment. Those who, like the tenants, reject his prophetic advent by not acknowledging his authority and producing the fruits of righteousness will be destroyed by the Father and judged to be outside of the kingdom of God. Just like the many prophets before, Jesus will succumb to the same tragic fate, thereby paradoxically becoming the chief cornerstone. The story of Israel and its long-suffering God is no longer one of unmitigated disobedience, but this very disobedience has led to the marvelous resurrection of God's son. If the past of Israel is marked by rebellion against its long-suffering God,<sup>104</sup> the future of Israel is reoriented around the person of Jesus and

---

<sup>101</sup> As Saldarini suggests, 'Conflict among groups within a religion, nation, or tradition arise from their cultural, political or geographical proximity and are fed by the substantial relationships that bind them to one another even as they fight'. Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community*, 198.

<sup>102</sup> Saldarini considers that the relationship between leaders and people is one of inequality. What he characterizes as the 'oppressed' and 'illiterate' 'lower class' is 'open to multiple influences'. However, this point is only made by Saldarini to excuse the crowd's actions during the passion narrative, 'Only when guided by the Jerusalem leaders, who are false guides in Matthew's eyes, do the crowds take hostile action against Jesus'. Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community*, 38-39.

<sup>103</sup> See Luz, for whom 21.43 'suggests that the Jewish leaders (and indirectly also the nation that is entangled with them) will suffer a horrible fate'. Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 43. Similarly, Olmstead notes, 'Matthew's narrative portrait of Jesus' encounter with Israel suggests that he did not intend the judgment that this trilogy declares to be restricted to the Jewish leadership. Instead, the nation itself is indicted. "This generation" is guilty of rejecting God's climactic appeal (11.16-19, cf. 12.38-42, 43-45; 16.1-4; 23.34-36; 24.34). Confronted by Israel's Messiah, "all the people" have called for his execution (27.20-26).' Wesley G. Olmstead, *Matthew's Trilogy of Parables: The Nation, the Nations and the Reader in Matthew 21:28-22:14*, ed. Richard Bauckham, SNTSMS (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 161.

<sup>104</sup> As Karl Barth suggests, 'This history [of Israel] speaks of the unbroken encounter, conversation, and resultant communion between a holy and faithful God with an unholy and unfaithful people. It speaks of both the unfailing presence of the divine partner and the failure of the human partner that should be holy as he is holy, answering his faithfulness with faithfulness'. Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology: an Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 21.

his authority. The failure by Jesus' Jewish contemporaries to recognize this opens the door for the inclusion of the Gentiles within the kingdom of God.

### 3.4. From Israel to the Church

The Gospel of Matthew narrates the story of the salvation of Israel through the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus, the long-awaited Messiah foretold by the scriptures. Matthew masterfully employs a variety of scriptural citations and allusions to consistently demonstrate the necessary Jewish antecedents that form the interpretive matrix of Jesus' life, beginning with an extensive genealogy that stretches back to Abraham right into Jesus' ministry and beyond to the life of the church. This movement from the Old Testament to Jesus to the contemporary life of the church broadly forms Matthew's concept of salvation-history and the overall structure and purpose of his gospel. But this transition from Israel to the church is not a seamless one in the story of Jesus and its apparent contradictions are only synthesized through the parable of the tenants. Jesus is firmly a Jewish Messiah, prohibiting the disciples from entering into the regions of the Gentiles and the Samaritans (Mt. 10.5-6) because Jesus has been 'sent *only* to the lost sheep of the house of Israel' (Mt. 15.24). By the same token, Matthew, echoing Isaiah 42.1, informs the reader that Jesus will announce justice to the Gentiles (Mt. 12.18) and in his name the Gentiles will hope (Mt. 12.21). Finally, Jesus' interactions with his fellow Jewish leaders are routinely critical and they fundamentally reject Jesus' ministry. So Jesus is somehow both for *and* against the Gentiles, devoted to the salvation of Jews, but highly critical of its present-day form and ultimately rejected by the very people he has come to save (Mt. 27.25). These tensions in the narrative are only resolved by way of Matthew's adept utilization of the parable of the tenants to provide a fuller account of salvation-history in accordance with both Scripture and the events of Jesus' life. Jesus comes as the Messiah to his people, Israel, but is rejected by them and crucified. Through this rejection, salvation comes to the Gentiles, as foretold by Scripture.<sup>105</sup> Set against this narrative backdrop, the parable of the tenants becomes the textual crux of the gospel as a whole and Matthew's concept of salvation-history *in nuce*.

---

<sup>105</sup> Much like Paul's image of the broken off and grafted olive branches in Romans 11.

### 3.5. Matthew and Mark

Though Matthew and Mark recount the same parable, their ‘mural’ approaches enable this common starting point to be rendered in different ways. Mark relates his parable to seminal Christological events of Jesus’ life. Every point at which God audibly or visibly bursts into the narrative is accompanied by a confession of Jesus’ divine sonship. This father-son motif is the relevant backdrop for the parable of the tenants and its parabolic depiction of the beloved Son of God. Jesus is the son only in relation to the Father and vice versa. Comparatively, Matthew has stifled some of the overt Christological claims of the Markan parable while accentuating its salvation-historical themes. If, for Mark, the parable of the tenants assumes supreme Christological significance as the point at which the meaning of ‘Son of God’ is definitively revealed, Matthew opts instead to explore the Christological significance of the parable through its salvation-historical themes, coordinating his parable within Israel’s broader history and Jesus’ sustained polemic against the Jewish leaders of his day. According to the ‘mural’ hermeneutics of Matthew and Mark, the parable of the tenants interfaces with pertinent events of the narrative to form a seamless narrative portrayal of Jesus’ identity.

### 4. Luke’s Parable and the Fate of Jerusalem

Turning to Luke, one is confronted immediately by its similarity to the Gospel of Thomas and pronounced divergence from the trademark Mark/Matthew flourishes. As in Thomas, Luke’s version of the parable lacks his predecessor’s metaphorical precision. Within the canonical collection, Luke stands out as a bit of an oddball in comparison to Mark and Matthew, omitting their overt references to Isaiah 5 and detailed descriptions of the treatment of the servants. In contrast to Thomas, this simple form has not led to an ethical reading of the parable; instead, Luke’s parable remains firmly Christological yet takes the parable in new directions. The result is highly illuminating for the present study as it illustrates another manner in which a ‘mural’ hermeneutic may open the parable of the tenants to a Christological understanding. Within the spectrum of Thomas, Mark and Matthew, Luke’s parable resides somewhere between Thomas and Mark/Matthew in both form and interpretation.

#### 4.1. General Features of the Lukan Parable

The most striking trait of the parable of the tenants in Luke is the absence of language derived from Isaiah 5 so prominent in Mark and Matthew. This severs the original Markan use of Isaiah 5 and its association of the vineyard with the nation of Israel.<sup>106</sup> The vineyard is only said to have been planted by the owner, whom Luke uniquely records as going away on a journey for a considerable amount of time. At the harvest, the owner sends a sequence of servants to collect from the farmers his share of the produce. As in Mark, but not Matthew or Thomas, the tenants beat the first servant (δέρω) and send him away empty-handed. A second servant is sent and he is beaten, dishonored (ἀτιμάζω), and again sent away empty-handed, omitting Mark's reference to a head wound (κεφαλιάω). The owner sends a third servant, who is wounded (τραυματίζω) and cast out (ἐκβάλλω). Similar to Thomas, and unlike Mark, the sending of the servants and the fate of the servants fails to mirror that of Israel's prophets.<sup>107</sup> None of these have any particular resonance with the treatment of the prophets, either in Luke itself or in the LXX.<sup>108</sup> The mistreatment of the prophets is spoken of in Luke on two separate occasions (11.47-50, 13.33-34), both of which emphasize that the prophets are killed by those to whom they are sent. The lack of correspondence between these descriptions and the treatment of the servants of the parable, especially given its presence in Luke's Markan source, suggests that Luke has avoided equating the servants with the prophets,

---

<sup>106</sup> Pace Kimball, who sees Isaiah 5 as the 'foundation' of Luke's parable. Charles A. Kimball, *Jesus' Exposition of the Old Testament in Luke's Gospel*, JSNT Supplement Series (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 154. Instead, it is likely that the force of the Matthew/Mark interpretation of the parable predisposes one to see a similar interpretation in Luke. If one were unaware of the parallel texts in Matthew and Mark and their Isaiah allusions, the Isaiah text would be indiscernible. Instead, Snodgrass' position seems to be the most tenable, for whom Luke has 'omitted irrelevant details' like the language from Isaiah 5. The remaining formal similarities between Isaiah 5 and Luke can be attributed to his inheritance from Mark. Snodgrass, *The Parable of the Wicked Tenants*, 48. See also, Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 70; Scott, *Hear Then the Parable: A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus*, 243-45.

<sup>107</sup> Cf. Fitzmyer, 'It may not be easy to say whom the servants sent to the tenants are meant to represent in the Lucan form of the parable (the prophets of old?)—if any specific group at all is intended'. Fitzmyer, *Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV*, 1281. See also Goulder, *Luke: A New Paradigm*, 693. Pace Kimball, for whom the tenants 'probably understood by the original hearers to represent the prophets of old'. Kimball, *Jesus' Exposition of the Old Testament in Luke's Gospel*, 155, emphasis mine. For an exegesis of Luke, this type of historical conjecture is unconvincing and methodologically suspect, confusing the historical possibility of how it might have been heard with Luke's own intention.

<sup>108</sup> Kloppenborg notes that τραυματίζω (Lk. 20.12) in particular is never used with reference to the prophets even though the τραυμα- word group appears 116 times in the LXX. He concludes that, 'Luke has done nothing to promote the identification of the slaves with the prophets'. Kloppenborg, *The Tenants in the Vineyard*, 208.

just as the Isaiah allusions have been omitted entirely. However congenial Luke is to a grand narrative of salvation history, this is not quite how the parable is utilized.<sup>109</sup>

As in Mt/Mk/Th, the owner pauses to consider his options, electing to send his beloved son (πέμψω τὸν υἱόν μου τὸν ἀγαπητόν) with the hopes that the tenants will be ashamed before him. In agreement with Matthew and against Mark, the tenants first see the son before plotting to kill him to gain his inheritance. Likewise, the son is first cast out of the vineyard and then killed. Jesus then rhetorically asks how the owner of the vineyard will respond to this rebellion. As in Matthew and Mark, he will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. Jesus' audience responds with shock and incredulity, 'μὴ γένοιτο'! Luke then uniquely narrates that Jesus looks directly at them, proceeding to quote from Psalm 117/118.22. Moreover, the Lukan Jesus explains, with Matthew, that those who fall over that stone will be dashed to pieces (συνθλάω) and those on whom the stone falls will be crushed (λिकμάω).

#### 4.2. Jesus' Parable to the People: The Immediate Setting of the Lukan Parable

The Lukan setting for the parable of the tenants is much like that of Matthew and Mark, but with several key differences. Luke places the parable of the tenants within Jesus' discourse in the temple after his triumphal entry, the cleansing of the temple, and the Jewish leaders' question over his authority. Following the triumphal entry, placed outside of Jerusalem as Jesus descends the Mount of Olives, Luke tempers the exuberant joy of the procession by inserting Jesus' lament over Jerusalem in which he prophesies of the city's destruction. Not one stone will be left on another because the city did not know the time of its visitation. After the comparatively brief temple incident, Luke's Jesus is said to be teaching in the temple (as with Matthew), but he is uniquely said to have done so daily to hostile Jewish leaders and a crowd that is hanging on his every word. One day later, the chief priests, scribes and elders come and question Jesus on the origin and nature of his authority to do 'these things' (ταῦτα), a

---

<sup>109</sup> Pace Talbert, "The story is actually another allegory of salvation history as Luke sees it (cf. 14:16-24; 19:11-27). Time and time again the tenants (the religious bureaucracy) fail to recognize God's authority in his prophets (e.g., John the Baptist—20:4-7) and repeatedly express hostility to God's messengers (13:34; Acts 7:52). How they have rejected even the beloved Son (3:22; Acts 7:53) ... The allegory implies that the bureaucracy recognized him but rejected him because they were unwilling to relinquish control over the vineyard to its rightful owner'. Talbert, *Reading Luke: A Literary and Theological Commentary*, 222.

reference to the preceding events and Jesus' current teaching and preaching the gospel.<sup>110</sup> As in Mark and Matthew, Jesus responds to their query with his own question about the origin of John the Baptist. Their failure to be able to answer the question prompts Jesus to withhold his answer to their question. Having been publically challenged by the Jewish leaders, Jesus undermined the authority with which the Jewish leaders have confronted him but he does not leave their challenge unanswered.<sup>111</sup> Rather than proceeding to directly tell the Jewish leaders a parable which indirectly answers their question, Jesus turns to the people who have been present heretofore.<sup>112</sup>

The immediate context provided by Luke for his parable offers two insights into the scope and meaning of the parable of the tenants. Firstly, the lament over Jerusalem prior to Jesus' entry into the city instills Jesus' actions and teachings in the city with a somber tone and begs the question of its ominous fate. Secondly, by directly addressing the people (ἔρξατο δὲ πρὸς τὸν λαὸν λέγειν τὴν παραβολήν, Lk. 20.9) in addition to the Jewish leaders, the parable addresses both them and the city at large to implicate both groups in its judgments.<sup>113</sup> While the people are sympathetic to Jesus now, this does not hold to be true through to the end of the gospel, with devastating results (Lk. 23.13-14). Finally, as in Mark and Matthew the question of Jesus' authority by the Jewish leaders that prompts the parable foregrounds the theme of Jesus' identity. If the backdrop for the parable of the tenants is: his journey into Jerusalem, his prediction of the city's future destruction and the question of Jesus' authority, these seemingly disjointed circumstances inevitably and necessarily frame the meaning of the parable in Luke. The result is a Lukan parable that, despite its setting and Christological emphasis comparable to Mark and Matthew, differs quite sharply in its application within the narrative.

---

<sup>110</sup> Cf. Knight, 'Jesus is condemned because of his teaching in the temple as much as for his behaviour in the temple'. Jonathan Knight, *Luke's Gospel* (London: Routledge, 1998), 50. See also, Robert C. Tannehill, *Luke* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 288.

<sup>111</sup> Cf. Nolland, 'those who represent that institutional framework have, by their equivocation, forfeited any right to have their own question treated as a legitimate quest for truth'. John Nolland, *Luke 18:35-24:53*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 945.

<sup>112</sup> This shift resolves the apparent difficulties of the Mark and Matthew setting, where Jesus tells the Jewish leaders that he will not divulge the origin and nature of his authority, only to then tell them a parable that answers their very question.

<sup>113</sup> A point overlooked by Tannehill and Nolland, who consider the parable to be told against the Jewish leaders alone. Nolland, *Luke 18:35-24:53*, 947-48; Tannehill, *Luke*, 289.

#### 4.3. The Visitation of the Rejected Cornerstone

For readers familiar with the Markan and Matthean versions of the parable of the tenants, the Lukan form frustrates attempts to force it into conformity.<sup>114</sup> If the Markan and Matthean parables utilize the Isaiah text to enable precise and immediate correspondence between the events and persons of the parable with the history of Israel and the life of Jesus, such identification markers are far less apparent in Luke. The comparatively simpler Lukan parable is not told as an elaborate allegory, but as a straightforward story of Jesus' rejection. An owner plants a vineyard, leases it to tenant-farmers, and they continually rebuff his attempts to retrieve his portion of the produce. The stream of servants sent by the owner is increasingly abused by the tenants, beating the first, beating and dishonoring the second, and wounding the third.<sup>115</sup> With each opportunity given by the owner, the tenants communicate their increasingly firm resolve to keep what they desire for themselves. When the son is sent, the trajectory of violence continues with the murder of the son. As with Mark's Christological interpretation of the parable, this beloved son is to be understood as Jesus himself on the basis of the prior designation of Jesus as a beloved son, with Luke altering the wording of his Markan source to more obviously reflect its occurrence in 3.22.<sup>116</sup> While Mark notes that Jesus is sent last (ἐσχατον, Mk. 12.6) to introduce salvation historical overtones, Luke lacks such temporal distinctions and therefore the accompanying salvation-historical designations. Additionally, the description of his death follows that of the passion narrative, being led away and then crucified (Lk.23.26, 23.32-33). The fruit sought by the son may be said to be the 'fruit worthy of repentance [καρπούς ἀξίους τῆς μετανοίας]' in Luke 3.8 and echoes elsewhere, such as 6.43-44 and 13.5-9. The son, Jesus, has been sent by God to preach repentance to all that they may turn and acknowledge the son. But instead of being received with contrition, he is murdered at their hands.

Unlike Matthew and Mark, the identity of the tenants is not made explicit, despite the acknowledgement by the Jewish leaders that Jesus spoke against them (πρὸς αὐτούς, Lk. 20.19). Without the identification of the vineyard as the nation of Israel via Isaiah 5 and without the prophetic overtones in the treatment of the servants, a narrow equating of the

---

<sup>114</sup> Cf. Bovon's honest admission, 'I do not know why Luke acts as he does' in his omission of Isaiah 5. François Bovon, *Luke 3: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 19:28-24:53*, ed. Helmut Koester, trans. James Crouch, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 36.

<sup>115</sup> Bovon, *Luke 3: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 19:28-24:53*, 36.

<sup>116</sup> C. Kavin Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology: The Lord in the Gospel of Luke* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), 167-68.



tenants with the Jewish leaders is somewhat problematic.<sup>117</sup> Certainly the Jewish leaders are included in his judgment, yet the audience scope of the parable, also addressed to the people, necessitates a wider scope. The warning against rejecting the beloved son applies to all who similarly reject Jesus and his call to repentance. Thus, it is the crowd who responds to the entirety of Jesus' parable in shock and disbelief.<sup>118</sup> Together, the address to the people by Jesus in 20.9 and this involuntary reply bookend Jesus' parable. The people are not bystanders to Jesus' teaching, but those whom he is concerned to convince.<sup>119</sup>

Jesus answers the people's alarm in a pronounced manner: looking directly at them (ἐμβλεψας αὐτοῖς), quoting Psalm 117/118.22 in the form of a question, and continuing with the pronouncement of judgment in Luke 20.18: 'Those who fall on that stone will be dashed to pieces, and on whoever it falls it will crush him'. The rejected son/cornerstone is vindicated (by God) to become the stone that holds the building together and the stone is either received with repentance or judges those who reject him.<sup>120</sup> The narrative's stage directions make Jesus' pronouncement emphatic in its seriousness and directly applicable to the crowd.<sup>121</sup> The drama of the parable has climatically led to this declaration and it is imperative that it be understood. If the scope of rejection is broadly applied by Luke, so is the judgment by the owner. Instead of Matthew's salvation-historical notion of transfer of the vineyard (through the Isaiah 5 association), the emphasis of the owner's action is on retribution, the death of those who reject the son. As in Matthew, the question of Jesus' authority which spawns his teaching gives way to this more significant teaching and even the parable itself

---

<sup>117</sup> The difficulty of interpreting the parable to be a warning exclusively directed against the Jewish leaders is exemplified by Craddock, who suggests that Jesus speaks in what is best described as a convoluted matrix of 'double indirection', whereby Jesus speaks to the Jewish leaders by not speaking to them. Fred B. Craddock, *Luke* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990), 233.

<sup>118</sup> As Kloppenborg notes, the people's 'hearing' (ἀκούσαντες, Lk. 20.16) is commonly used as a conclusion in Luke to modify the entirety of the prior teaching. Kloppenborg, *The Tenants in the Vineyard*, 212. The people are not simply shocked at the judgment of the owner, but at the whole parable. This makes their eventual rejection of Jesus all the more striking.

<sup>119</sup> Cf. Bock, 'Given (a) the parable's placement after the remarks of 19:41-44, (b) Jesus' upcoming warnings to those in the city (23:26-31), and (c) judgment texts like Luke 11:29-32 (spoken in Galilee!), Luke 13:32-35, and Acts 4:27, Luke narratively sees the parable as a warning to the nation and its leaders who have led it astray. To restrict the tenants to the leaders alone is too narrow. Luke 2:34 does teach of a divided Israel, but Luke 19:41-44 and Acts 28:25-28 reveal that most of the nation does not respond and is culpable'. Bock, *Luke*, 1597.

<sup>120</sup> Knight has contended that the cornerstone saying is cited here to suggest a reconstitution of the temple in the person of Jesus, the cornerstone of that temple. This would contrast the existing temple with the figurative temple, Jesus. But the point of the citation seems not to refer to Jesus' present person, Jesus as temple, but his future vindication in the resurrection, which is how Peter utilizes it in Acts 4.11. Cf. Knight, *Luke's Gospel*, 132-33.

<sup>121</sup> Cf. Kloppenborg, 'In the parable Luke uses the expression [ἐμβλέψας] to introduce a pointed response to the people's interjection and to mark a sharp transition between Jesus' story, told in realistic terms, and its application to the present circumstances'. Kloppenborg, *The Tenants in the Vineyard*, 213.

assume secondary importance to this proclamation. Together, Luke 20.18 and 19 form for Luke the central message of the parable of the tenants and, as will be shown below, the continued proclamation of the church. The resurrected son will crush those who reject him, but to those who accept him with repentance he brings salvation.

The language used here to describe God's judgment can also be said to mirror that of Jesus' earlier lament used to outline the destruction of the city and the reason for its desolation. Though they agree almost verbatim, Luke exceeds Matthew's opaque nod to 70 A.D. in Mt. 21.44 through these nearby resonances. Just as the stones of the city will not be left on top of one another (Lk. 19.44) so too will the cornerstone dash to pieces those who reject it (Lk. 20.18). Similarly, the failure of the city to recognize 'the time of its visitation' (Lk. 19.44) closely corresponds to the parable's visitation of the son to the vineyard. Luke has framed his parable with overt references to the destruction of Jerusalem and these form the background to understand the judgment described by the parable itself.<sup>122</sup> The parable then becomes an indictment against the city and a prediction of its future destruction and its handing over of the city to Roman authorities.<sup>123</sup> Rather than Matthew and Mark's salvation-historical reading of the parable (again, by way of Isaiah 5), the Lukan setting seems to firmly bind together the conclusion of the parable of the tenants and the future destruction of Jerusalem. The point of the parable's judgment is not the status of God's people (Mark) or membership within the kingdom of God (Matthew), but the imminent threat of God's judgment against the city of Jerusalem. The beloved son has visited the city and been rejected by them, a decision which set into motion a series of events leading to God's retribution against the city itself.

#### 4.4. Jesus' Prophetic Ministry of Repentance and Judgment

As with Matthew and Mark, the parable of the tenants assumes a significant role within the wider narrative, echoing several of its main themes and motifs. Perhaps most directly, the parable is strikingly parallel in both form and interpretation to the parable of the fig tree in Luke 13.6-9. This parable of the fig tree is unique to Luke and possibly represents a combination of two separate incidents: Jesus' encounter with a fig tree in Mark 11.13 and the

---

<sup>122</sup> Cf. Craddock, 'The story that is unfolded in the parable brings to mind first the fall of Jerusalem and its subsequent control by the Roman military'. Craddock, *Luke*, 234.

<sup>123</sup> Cf. Tannehill, *Luke*, 291. Pace Talbert, *Reading Luke: A Literary and Theological Commentary*, 222. This point should be tentatively made, since the 'others' could also represent Gentiles. The ambiguity lies in Luke's opaque, or missing altogether, metaphorical identification of the vineyard.

parable of the tenants in Mark 12.1.<sup>124</sup> In it, a man has planted a fig tree in his vineyard. Seeking fruit from it, he finds none. If the tree does not bear fruit within the next year, it will be cut down. This parable follows Jesus' prior teaching in which Jesus twice warns his hearers to repent or else they will be destroyed. The implication is clear; the hearers, like the fig tree, must repent (produce fruit) or else they will perish (Lk. 13.1-5). Like the parable of the tenants, the parable is addressed to the people, the imagery of producing fruit is likened to repentance, and the failure to do so will be met with judgment (ἀπόλλυμι, Lk. 13.3, 5, and 20.16). These parables are not separate, unrelated incidents within the narrative, but can be said to represent the repeated attempt of Jesus to resolve the people's continuing problem of non-repentance. But if the threat of judgment is forestalled in the parable of the fig tree through the appeal of the vinedresser (a character likely symbolic of Jesus), in the parable of the tenants the judgment is now impending and final. Whatever previous allowance and forbearance was given to the people has been exhausted and retribution will be swiftly given. If the parable of the fig tree was an initial warning to the people, the parable of the tenants is the final call for repentance before the foretold judgment comes.

If the indictment of the parable of the tenants levied at the city as a whole reflects Jesus' previous foretelling of the destruction of Jerusalem, the later prophesy concerning the city likewise echoes the theme of the parable. Jesus, shortly after repeating his previous lament over Jerusalem, foretells again that not one stone will be left upon another (Lk. 19.44, 21.6) and that the city will be blockaded by foreign armies (Lk. 19.43, 21.20). Here Jesus explicitly names the Gentiles as the visible perpetrators of this violence against Jerusalem (Lk. 21.14), events which unfold according to God's own plan as foretold in scripture (Lk. 21.22). This plan, Luke uniquely says, is one of vengeance (ἐκδίκησις), an echo of the parable of the tenants' theme of retribution for the city's rejection of Jesus, the beloved son. Jesus' discourse against Jerusalem thus follows his understanding of the parable and outlines more precisely the actual historical events which its divine judgment entails. In this final prophesy, the justification for its retributive destruction is not elaborated and therefore depends upon the rationale of the parable of the tenants. Within the gospel as a whole, the parable of the tenants is the principal place where the justification for God's judgment against the city of Jerusalem is outlined.

---

<sup>124</sup> Perhaps taking a cue from Mt. 24.32's suggestion that the judgment of the fig tree is a parable. Goulder, *Luke: A New Paradigm*, 561.

Above it was suggested that Jesus' looking directly at the crowd to quote Psalm 117/118.<sup>22</sup> and the following judgment against those who reject the stone establishes the Psalm quotation as the immediate significance of the parable for both the crowd and the Jewish leaders. This reading is confirmed when turning to Acts and its reiteration of the cornerstone saying. Unlike the more circumscribed scope given to the parable of the lost sheep in the above chapter, here Acts takes up Jesus' teaching into the proclamation of Peter after his arrest. In reply to a question which is strikingly similar to the one asked of Jesus prior to the parable of the tenants, the disciples are asked, 'by what power or in what name do you do this' (ἐν ποίᾳ δυνάμει ἢ ἐν ποίᾳ ὀνόματι ἐποιήσατε τοῦτο ὑμεῖς; Acts 4.7).<sup>125</sup> Peter straightforwardly answers their query, announcing that the good deed has been done in the name of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom Peter further declares to be 'the stone which has been rejected by you builders, which has become the cornerstone' (Acts 4.11). This recapitulates much of what is implied in the parable of the tenants.<sup>126</sup> Jesus is the stone, rejected by Jewish leaders, and vindicated as the cornerstone by God through the resurrection. The stone saying forms the fundamental scriptural basis upon which Peter defends the rejection, death and resurrection of Jesus—just as Jesus had so strongly emphasized the significance of the same stone saying of the parable. Likewise, this event must be proclaimed both to the Jewish leaders and to all the people of Israel (παντὶ τῷ λαῷ Ἰσραὴλ, Acts 4.10),<sup>127</sup> a universal scope that reflects the audience of the parable of the tenants. In the same way that the parable is addressed to both the Jewish leaders and the people, Peter believes his proclamation must be known by all. Through Luke's utilization of the parable and the cornerstone metaphor, Jesus is the stone upon which all of humanity is either saved or judged.

In each of these instances, the themes of the parable of the tenants reach forwards and backwards within the larger framework of the narrative, expounding and illuminating its

---

<sup>125</sup>Cf. Luke T. Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, ed. D.J. Harrington, Sacra Pagina Series (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 77.

<sup>126</sup> Cf. Tannehill, 'In Luke 20:2 Jesus was asked, "By what authority are you doing these things?"; in Acts 4:7 Peter and John are asked, "By what power or what name did you do this?" The same group poses the question in the two instances. Peter, in responding to the question, refers to the stone scorned by the builders that has become head of the corner (Acts 4:11), repeating (with some variation in wording) a Scripture quotation used by Jesus in Luke 20:17. This quotation follows Jesus' accusation of the rulers for wishing to kill God's greatest messenger, an accusation expressed in the indirect form of a parable. This accusation is directly made in the Acts speeches. So the Scripture reference to the stone in Acts 4:11 recalls the rejection and vindication of Jesus in imagery already used by Jesus'. Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: a Literary Interpretation*, vol. 2 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 69.

<sup>127</sup> Cf. Fitzmyer, 'Peter directs his explanation not only to the religious authorities of Jerusalem but to all Israel; thus he continues his apostolic testimony in Jerusalem (see 1:8) but broadens it into a missionary speech directed to all Israel as well'. J.A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 300.

meaning. The parable functions within Jesus' ministry as a call to repentance to avoid the impending judgment, seen prophetically in the destruction of Jerusalem. Its conclusion is then taken up in Acts as the scriptural foundation for the kerygma of the church. In each of these themes the issue of Christology so prominent in Matthew and Mark is acknowledged and present, but secondary to its integration with Jesus' wider call to repentance and the later mission of the church. The son of the parable is still the beloved son of the baptism and transfiguration, but this reality is the basis for Luke's further anthropological orientation. For Luke, the question of Christology is one that is inextricably bound to the repentant response, since the identity of Jesus is only properly understood and received with contrition. This turn of the parable toward repentance is made through a number of key interpretive decisions. The loss of the Isaiah 5 co-text and subsequent ambiguity of the identity of the tenants allows the parable to speak to Luke's wider audience, which includes the Jewish leaders as well as the crowd. Will they repent, or will they reject the one who has visited them? Additionally, Jesus' looking directly at the crowd before responding their astonished reply, allows the cornerstone saying to assume its prominent role as the climax and definitive meaning of the parable. Consequently, the judgment of the parable is not cast in salvation-historical terms, as in Matthew, but in Thomas' more either/or decision; in Luke one is either for or against Jesus the cornerstone.

## 5. The Christological Possibilities of 'Data' and 'Mural' Approaches

Though the Gospels of Thomas, Mark, Matthew, and Luke all record the same general parable, they have understood it in highly distinctive ways. Thomas utilizes the parable for its economic significance to warn believers against becoming too attached to the world. Mark has rendered the parable in accordance with its strong emphasis on the revelation of the Son of God, coordinating the parable with key moments in the life of Jesus. As the most definitive statement of Jesus' identity as the 'Son of God', it is one of the hinges upon which the gospel turns.<sup>128</sup> The convincing force of Mark's Christological interpretation is felt by Matthew and Luke respectively, though they have received the parable in highly diverse and individual ways. Matthew continues Mark's Christological emphasis, but utilizes the parable's report of the rejection of the Jewish leaders to form a cohesive salvation-history moving from Israel to

---

<sup>128</sup> Cf. Drury, "The parable alerts the reader to the significance of what has happened and of what will happen on either side of it. It is a key which belongs with its lock. The book is its setting." Drury, *The Parables in the Gospels: History and Allegory*, 66.

the church. Luke likewise has interpreted the parable in Christological terms, but has done so without recourse to Mark and Matthew's integration of Isaiah 5. Without this direct link with the Old Testament, the simpler parable loses some of its salvation-historical overtones to more powerfully emphasize the adjoined stone saying, a point continued into Acts and the preaching of the early church. This Thomas/Mark/Matthew/Luke comparison of the parable of the tenants highlights an interesting contrast between a 'mural' and 'data' approach to the Jesus tradition and its significance for the issue of Jesus' identity.

Comparing Thomas' sayings collection, 'data' approach with the 'mural' approaches of Matthew, Mark and Luke, it becomes clear how the arc of the narrative can prioritize some teachings against others. Narratives are driven by a plot that is comprised of the introduction and climatic resolution of various conflicts. Each component part of the plot is necessary for the plot's progression. Yet the climax of the narrative is the culmination of what comes before it and therefore has greater hermeneutical significance than the exposition. For Mark, the parable of the tenants is the *pièce de résistance* of Mark's Christological teaching and the definitive teaching on Jesus' identity as the Son of God. Here, the structure of the narrative imbues this parable with greater significance within the narrative than, for example, the title 'Son of David' since it is the point at which the secrecy of Jesus' identity is revealed to the reader and his Jewish opponents. Similarly, in Matthew the parable of the tenants resolves the tensions between Jesus' Jewish/messianic heritage, his exclusive ministry to the Jews, his rejection by them and scriptures' promise of salvation to the Gentiles. The parable of the tenants integrates all of these elements to provide a synthetic account of salvation history. Finally, for Luke the parable of the tenants justifies God's judgment against the city of Jerusalem. By contrast, for Thomas the interpretation of the parable of the tenants is reinforced by its immediate context, yet the significance of that small collection relative to the broader sayings collection is indistinct. Apart from the introduction in Sayings 1-6, which serves to introduce the programmatic 'seeking and finding' motif, the importance of any given saying of Jesus is weighted the same for all the sayings. As a simple compilation of Jesus' teaching, no distinction is made between, for example, Saying 28 and Saying 108.<sup>129</sup> Even the conclusion of Thomas does not have any particular significance for the whole of the gospel.

---

<sup>129</sup> DeConick hypothesizes that the original kernel Gospel of Thomas was arranged according to a series of five speeches. Aside from issues I have concerning the confidence she demonstrates in discovering the kernel gospel (as noted in a Chapter Two), it is significant that this is only possible for her once the discerned accretions have been removed. So even if there was an early text that was ordered according to content this has not been maintained by the subsequent editors of Thomas and this hypothetical difference could be attributed to the inherently democratic sayings collection form. DeConick, *Recovering the Original Gospel of Thomas*, 113-30.

Instead, what matters is simply that Jesus is the speaker of the teaching. So if the order of a narrative is essential to its plot and this necessarily creates a hierarchy of significance within the gospel, the list format of a 'data', sayings collection is inherently democratic and unable to establish the priority of one saying over against another saying.

More significantly for this study, the different attitudes toward time elaborated in the previous chapter can now be said to have significant Christological ramifications. For Mk/Mt/Luke, the Christological implications of this parable are possible only through the parable's setting within a broader narrative of Jesus' life, while for Thomas, it is the de-historicizing tendency of the 'data' approach that enables the parable's inherent economic possibilities to be utilized. It is the Markan narrative which informs the reader of the identity of the beloved Son, directly relating it to Jesus alone. The parable is interpreted through the events of the narrative and vice-versa. Mark's rendering is continued by Matthew and Luke and developed in unique ways. The Matthean history of Jesus coincides with the history of Israel, Jesus' mission to the Jews, their rejection of him, and the commission to evangelize the Gentiles. Jesus is none other than the rejected Messiah of Israel. For Luke the parable and cornerstone saying are carried into the proclamation of the church as a central metaphor for understanding Jesus' identity. Jesus is the one by which all of humanity is judged. To those who receive him with repentance he is life and salvation, but those who reject him will be destroyed. In each of these texts, it is the dynamic interplay of the narrative setting and Jesus' teaching which exert a hermeneutical, Christological pressure on the parable. By mediating the past event of Jesus through a narrative context, the passage of time and the sequence of events become essential to the thought world of the text and its principal subject matter. The teachings are not discrete entities, but placed within the dynamic complex of Jesus' activity within the world. By narrating a broader story of Jesus' life, a 'mural' hermeneutic is inherently ordered to ask questions of Jesus' identity but this common temporal horizon also enables and encourages strong continuity between person, event and teaching. As Mark, Matthew and Luke's 'mural' interpretations of the parable of the tenants show, a parable within a narrative context may readily coordinate the world of the parable with the world of the narrative, thereby making Jesus' identity within time a prominent theme of the parable.

This offers a clue as to why a 'data' approach might omit or avoid a Christological interpretation of a parable, rather than simply attributing this to Thomas' evasive

Christology.<sup>130</sup> As shown in the previous chapter, a ‘data’ approach to the Jesus tradition has an inherent de-historicizing tendency as the historical origins of Jesus’ teaching are obscured almost entirely. Without this historical anchor within the life of Jesus, the teachings of Jesus are not constrained by the common temporal horizon of narrative and are thus freed to be associated with any number of different topics and concerns. Certainly a saying could still be associated with Jesus’ person, as the Christological interpretation of the parable of the lost sheep in the previous chapter demonstrates, but the lack of temporal events within a ‘data’ approach makes such an association increasingly difficult for the reader. As a discrete teaching, there is little inherent within any given parable which demands a Christological teaching and the metaphorical world of the parable may be freely correlated to any number of other topics. So it is somewhat expected that the parable of the tenants in Thomas has likely lost an original reference to Jesus’ life and instead been utilized in a purely ethical manner. If narrative pushes the Christological question of Jesus’ teaching to the fore, this pressure does not seem to be exerted by a ‘data’ method to the Jesus tradition.

### 5.1. The Christ of Narrative and the Jesus of Sayings

Having established the tendencies of ‘mural’ and ‘data’ hermeneutics toward and away from a Christological interpretation of Jesus’ teaching, the question then arises whether these interpretive approaches broadly entail a particular form of Christological beliefs. What kind of identity is a narrative identity? And what kind of identity of Jesus is implied if he is only known according to the ‘data’ of his teaching? If narrative presents the teachings of Jesus with reference to the past events of his life, it follows from this that a narrative context tends to also construe Jesus’ identity *in relation* to other characters in the historical, narrative world. The Jesus of narrative cannot be reduced to his self-understanding or his relation to himself (*in se*), but he is who he is by reaching out into the world, a point dynamically illustrated by each of the canonical evangelists’ interpretation of the parable of the tenants. Within Mark’s rendering of the parable, Jesus’ identity is most clearly revealed through his relation to the Father who declares his divine sonship. In the only two places where God unequivocally appears within

---

<sup>130</sup> So while Thomas, in Saying 52, contrasts the ‘living’ Jesus with the ‘dead’ prophets whom the disciples mistakenly suggest ‘spoke in’ Jesus, and Saying 13 refutes Matthew and Peter’s attempts to define Jesus in relation to analogous figures, endorsing Thomas’ own apophatic response, these are not necessarily the sole reason why Thomas’ interpretation of the parable of the tenants has omitted and resisted, a salvation-historical, or Christological interpretation of the parable. Instead, the broader question is whether there is something in a ‘data’ approach that permits or even promotes an ethical reading of the parable.



the narrative, he announces his approval of Jesus, his son. Yet even this incipient intra-Trinitarian relation is not a self-contained reality as the parable suggests that this sonship is revealed through Jesus' obedience to the Father through his being sent by the Father to the world. Likewise in Matthew, Jesus' identity is inexplicable apart from his relation to salvation-history. By virtue of his relation to Israel's past and present, Jesus is the climax of Israel's history and the dawn of salvation to the Gentiles. For Luke, Jesus is the cornerstone upon which all of humanity either stands or falls: Jesus is both the savior and the judge of the world. The authors of Mt/Mk/Lk narrate Jesus' identity through dramatic events within history, and therefore of Jesus' relation to others. This relational constitution of Jesus' identity coheres with Hans Frei's two paradigms of Jesus' narrative identity outlined in Chapter One, his intention-action and the agency of others. Jesus is who he is through what he does and what is contingently done to him by others, including the Father. This interrelation between the agency of Jesus and the agency of others is clearly seen in the parable of the tenants.

It should be noted, however, that there are a number of ways in which Frei does not seem to be altogether comfortable with this second, contingent manner in which Jesus' identity is established, or at least he has not consistently pursued its implications. First, Frei has a strong tendency to employ impersonal terms when describing those whose actions upon Jesus inform his identity. These others are frequently described as 'circumstances' or historical forces instead of people with agencies of their own. This creates an imbalance in Frei's discussion within the two sides of identity constitution, one through personal agency, the other through impersonal powers. Such a discrepancy seems to reflect a misgiving of Frei to make Jesus' identity somehow dependent upon the human agency in history. Secondly, Frei explicitly relegates Jesus' contingency to the passion. The life of Jesus is marked by the transition from power to helplessness from the Garden of Gethsemane onwards. The movement from Jesus' initiative to that of God's, the 'increasing stress on the dominance of God's activity over that of Jesus, starting with Gethsemane and Jesus' arrest, reaches its climax, not in the account of Jesus' death, but in that of his resurrection. It is here—even more than in the crucifixion—that God and God alone is active'.<sup>131</sup> For Frei, the Gospels narrate the transition from Jesus' intention-action to God's action. While this may seem to be a decisive affirmation of the establishment of Jesus' identity through the agency of others, it raises more questions than it answers concerning how Frei's paradigm coheres. It seems odd for Jesus' identity to be contingent upon others at one place in the narrative and not at others. Is not Jesus' identity also constituted through

---

<sup>131</sup> Frei, *The Identity of Jesus*, 123, emphasis mine.

others' agency prior to the passion? This question leads to the third issue with Frei's configuration of the two modes in which Jesus' identity is established. Though the above point strongly emphasizes the activity of the world (and by extension the Father) over against Jesus', this possibility seems itself to be a function of Jesus' intention-action. Frei writes: 'we have several sayings that testify to Jesus' abiding initiative in and even over the circumstances that hold him in thrall, so that they come to be, by the subtle reversal, at *his* service... So Jesus is and remains powerful to the end, constraining all acts and words, even those of his opponents, to testify to him'.<sup>132</sup> So while both Jesus' intention-action and contingency 'coexist', the latter is primary, dependent upon and subservient to the former.

In these ways, Frei does not coherently outline how the two modes of identity establishment may relate to one another and the result is a preference for Jesus' intention-action over his contingency.<sup>133</sup> This is openly acknowledged by Frei, for whom, 'our categories for identity description break down' at the point of Jesus' contingency. These categories 'cannot describe how external events become ingredient in a person's identity directly, i.e., other than by his own response to them'. But instead of questioning the adequacy of his paradigm, he weakly suggests that one needs 'simply to tell the story of the events' and points to the 'mysterious coincidence' of Jesus' identity between his intention-action and his contingency.<sup>134</sup> Thinking with Frei and the sophisticated framework he attempts to outline, perhaps the way forward lies in recognizing at a fundamental level the inextricable nature of Jesus' intention-action and his contingency as simultaneously operative at every point in the narrative. When character and setting collide through the interplay of agencies, both are mutually illumined and the meaning of the narrative shines through the resultant radiance. Accordingly, it may be said that Jesus' intention-action is itself conditioned by and dependent upon the agency of the world. At all times Jesus both acts and is acted upon by virtue of his life in time and the world and his identity is constituted by this simultaneous reality throughout the narrative. The Jesus who teaches is simultaneously heard; Jesus both elects to heal and responds to the request for healing; Jesus is killed by his opponents and raised by his father. So it is not only that a 'mural' hermeneutic promotes a Christological rendering of Jesus' teaching.

---

<sup>132</sup> Frei, *The Identity of Jesus*, 117-18.

<sup>133</sup> Cf. Watson, 'Frei tends to accord privileged status to his intention-action model, and he is excessively cautious about ascribing an identity to Jesus that is 'anterior and subsequent to each intention-action'. Watson, *Text and Truth: Redefining Biblical Theology*, 93.

<sup>134</sup> Frei, *The Identity of Jesus*, 101.

It is also the case that this narrative rendering of Jesus' identity has a particular shape, depicting it through the interrelation of his agency and the agency of others.

If the identity of Jesus is constituted by the interaction of agencies, then this places his temporal life in the world at the heart of who he is. By virtue of the historical anchor of a 'mural' approach, Jesus is, as Frei repeatedly insisted, unsubstitutable: he is only himself and cannot be any other. Jesus lived in a particular place and at a particular time in history. These facts are not incidental to Jesus' personhood, but essential to a genuine understanding of his identity. If Jesus' identity is constituted historically through his interaction with the world, then the subsequent affirmation of Jesus' (triune) divinity necessitates that the identity of God is revealed in, if not constituted by, his relation to the world.<sup>135</sup> It can also be said that the Christology that emerges from this 'mural' hermeneutic is nascently kerygmatic. Not that the narrative form is itself, somehow, inherently kerygmatic, rather that the selection of a narrative presentation of Jesus' identity anticipates and parallels the gospels' proclamation that the life of one man in history is of universal significance for the world. The Jesus of narrative is one who is known by his interaction with others and therefore his effect and reception within the world constitutes who he is, just as Philip Melancthon wrote, 'to know Christ is to know his benefits'.<sup>136</sup> Jesus' identity is dialogical: he is who he is in his relation to the world. That the life of this one man is for the benefit of all humanity is the specific affirmation of the kerygma, dependent upon God's own identification with Jesus and the specific shape of his life, but the formal narrative structure of Jesus' life in relation to others congruously coheres with this proclamation, to be received in faith.

For a 'data' approach to the Jesus tradition, since it has an inherent de-historicizing tendency, then Jesus' identity is largely not construed through his relation to his contemporaries, but in his largely relation-less, monological speech.<sup>137</sup> Jesus is who he is

---

<sup>135</sup> Cf. Eberhard Jüngel, 'If revelation as God's *being for* us is to be taken seriously, then in Jesus Christ God's being must *become* visible and *be able* to become visible. This means, however, that both this becoming and this capacity to become must be understood from God's being itself, if indeed it is really true that God has revealed *himself*. And, on the other hand, God's being must be thought of with regard to this becoming and capacity if it is true that God has *revealed* himself. Thus we must in any event formulate God's *historicality*'. Eberhard Jüngel, *God's Being is in Becoming: The Trinitarian Being of God in the Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. John Webster (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001), 109.

<sup>136</sup> W. Pauck, *Melancthon and Bucer* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), 21.

<sup>137</sup> Certainly, the Gospel of Thomas does contain several dialogues with a variety of figures (Sayings 6, 12, 13, 18, 20, 21, 22, 24, 37, 43, 51, 52, 53, 60, 61, 72, 79, 91, 99, 104, 104, 113, 114), but like Bultmann's apophthegm form these simple scenes are the husks utilized to underscore the kernel of Jesus' teaching. Accordingly, there is very little in these scenes which illuminate the particular identity of Jesus within history and whatever may be gleaned about Jesus is at best incidental to who he is. For example, one may deduce from Saying 99 that Jesus has brothers and sisters, but this suggestion is directly refuted by Jesus. The Gospel of Thomas, rather than being a difference of degree or kind compared to Mt/Mk/Lk, maintains that Jesus' identity

entirely unconditioned by those to whom he reveals himself. His being is not constituted by his dialogical gift to others; rather the gift of understanding to the reader is unilateral. For the 'data' interpreter of the Jesus tradition, Jesus' identity is not established through the dynamics of the relationship of Jesus to time and the world or through the interrelation of his agency and the agency of others. Jesus does not act in a personal manner, nor is he acted upon by others: he only speaks. Without an understanding of Jesus' place within history provided by the narrative gospels, very little is known about why Jesus speaks, or under what circumstances he reveals his pearls of wisdom, or even what kind of person he is.

If one is to infer Jesus' identity from the 'data' available then one is inclined to conclude that he is a dynamic teacher. Unsurprisingly, this is the position taken by many scholars who take the Gospel of Thomas as the starting point of their Christological reflection.<sup>138</sup> Similarly, for Bultmann, Jesus is first and foremost a preacher (as seen in Chapter One) and it is only through the medium of his word that his identity can be grasped.<sup>139</sup> Jesus is only what he says in his teaching and not by what he does or what is done to him. The question of the specific content of Jesus' identity becomes a question of his proclamation. This opens for Bultmann the question of how Jesus the preacher became the Jesus of the church's proclamation, or in the Bultmannian slogan, how '*the proclaimer became the proclaimed* [*Aus dem Verkündiger ist der Verkündigte geworden*]'.<sup>140</sup> When Jesus can only be identified through his message, the bridge between these two needlessly stands on shaky foundations since it becomes an issue of the straightforward coherence between Jesus' words and that of the church, rather than a coherence of Jesus' person. Luke can affirm a distinction between the Jesus' own proclamation and the proclamation about Jesus in the church because the unity of these distinctive proclamations is maintained through Jesus' own person/activity and the common response of repentance. For Bultmann, it does not seem to matter *how* Jesus lived, or *what* he was like. It matters only *that* he lived and taught. The problem then arises whether the 'data' interpretive approaches is adequate to the task of Christological reflection on Jesus'

---

is unconditioned by his being in time. This is particularly true since the Gospel of Thomas specifically refutes the presentations of Jesus offered by other narrative gospels (Saying 13).

<sup>138</sup> Cf. J. D. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991); Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Wisdom*.

<sup>139</sup> 'For people then, who like Jesus have acted through the word [i.e. preaching], it may be that what they have willed is only reproduced as a group of sayings, of ideas—as *teaching*. [Bei den Personen nun, die wie Jesus durch das *Wort* gewirkt haben, läßt sich das, was sie gewollt haben, ja nur reproduzieren als ein Zusammenhang von Sätzen, von Gedanken, als *Lehre*.]' Bultmann, *Jesus*, 13. Cf. Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word*, 10.

<sup>140</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Theologie des neuen Testaments* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1977), 35.

personhood. Can the person who is only known through teachings be really said to have a knowable identity?<sup>141</sup> Is he still a person if he has no history? If one is moved by the genius of Jesus' teaching to inquire into the identity of this speaker one has left the realm of what a 'data' approach is able to say about him. Instead, a 'data' hermeneutic is inherently uninterested in Jesus' personhood. He speaks, yes, but little else is known about him. This Jesus has no history, no beginning, middle, or end. He is an anonymous figure who remains mysteriously shrouded, beyond comprehension.<sup>142</sup> Apart from the uniqueness of his words, there is little to distinguish this Jesus from any other person. To return to the Gospel of Thomas' understanding of the parable of the tenants, the disinterest in a Christological understanding of the parable is to be expected, given the paucity of information about his person available to this strict 'data' interpreter of the Jesus tradition.

---

<sup>141</sup> Cf. Eleonore Stump's contention that non-narrative, propositional truth of one's person cannot enable genuine understanding of that person. An effective narrative presentation of someone, 'makes that character available to us in somewhat the same way the character would have been if he had in fact been directly and immediately present to us. The story thus contributes to our having and learning from something like a second-person experience, only it is our experience with the character of the story'. Eleonore Stump, *Walking in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2010), 80.

<sup>142</sup> Cf. Kay, 'stemming from the results of form criticism and the other from an interpretation of eschatology, Bultmann strips [the present Christ of faith] of all character traits, and, hence, of any personal identity with [the historical Jesus]'. Kay then rhetorically asks, 'Is the voice announcing, "I love you," only that of an anonymous caller? Shorn of his identity as Jesus of Nazareth, does the *Christus praesens* logically become a naked "x," a "mythological cipher," a "spectre," or a "ghost"?' Kay, *Christus Praesens: A Reconsideration of Rudolf Bultmann's Christology*, 120.

## Conclusion - Assessing the Value of 'Data' and 'Mural' Approaches

### 1. Summary

This study has been a comparison of what I call 'data' and 'mural' approaches to the Jesus tradition in order to outline some of their inherent interpretive tendencies. Of what significance is one's chosen hermeneutical approach to the Jesus tradition and how might it affect the resultant interpretation and theology? I define a 'data' approach to be one which understands the individual teachings of Jesus to be discrete entities, apart from a narrow embedding of these within a wider story of Jesus' life. What matters for a 'data' interpreter is simply *that* Jesus said something and these data can be understood in their own right. By contrast, a 'mural' approach views the shape and unfolding of the story of Jesus' life to be constitutive of the meaning of Jesus' teaching and actions. So it not only matters that Jesus said something, but it also matters where, when, to whom, and why these events occurred. Narrative details cannot be discarded as extraneous; rather they are determinative for the meaning of Jesus' teachings. These two approaches, 'data' and 'mural', are represented in early Christianity by the texts of Thomas and Matthew/Mark/Luke and it is this comparison which has comprised the bulk of the present study, comparing and contrasting their renderings of two of Jesus' parables.

To illustrate the 'data' and 'mural' approaches to the Jesus tradition within the ancient context Chapter One began by examining Clement of Alexandria and Chrysostom's interpretations of the parable of the sower. This contrast between 'data' and 'mural' approaches is then represented within the modern day by the hermeneutics of Rudolf Bultmann and Hans Frei and it is these interpreters who are revisited in subsequent chapters. Bultmann's form-criticism of his *History of the Synoptic Tradition* sought to determine the original kernel of the Jesus tradition, systematically discarding the secondary narrative husk of the tradition. The resultant primitive stratum of the Jesus tradition is comprised of serialized sayings of Jesus similar to that of P.Oxy.1, the Greek text which was later discovered to be a fragment of the Gospel of Thomas. When Bultmann turns to interpret this primitive tradition in his *Jesus* book, he focuses exclusively on Jesus' teaching, a choice which is likely informed by his Lutheran view of Jesus as the preacher of the Word. In these separate historical and interpretive choices, Bultmann reveals himself to be a 'data' interpreter of the Jesus tradition, seeking to understand Jesus' teachings apart from a wider story of his life and actions. By contrast, Frei sees the narrative form of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke as

foundational for their meaning, eschewing the interpretive practices of modernity he believes led to the eclipse of biblical narrative. Instead, the narrative form presents Jesus as one whose identity is manifested through his own agency and the agency of others. This places Jesus' teaching within the wider context of his historical life and ministry. A brief survey of modern day parable study concludes the chapter, identifying their 'data' and 'mural' predispositions.

Chapter Two lays the groundwork for a comparison between Thomas and Mt/Mk/Lk by way of a study of Thomas' compositional history. Rather than locating the Gospel of Thomas outside of the synoptic conversation, it belongs with Mt/Mk/Lk as a fourth synoptic witness to Jesus. This justifies a comparison between Thomas and Mt/Mk/Lk as 'data' and 'mural' interpreters of the Jesus tradition, as both are simultaneously operative within early Christianity. Thomas' 'data' approach is not a *late*, foreign imposition upon an otherwise unitary 'mural' tradition, nor is Thomas itself an *early* representative of the Jesus tradition. Within their common synoptic plane, the 'data' and 'mural' renderings of Jesus can be said to be an interpretive choice on the part of the respective authors. What follows is a comparison of the Greek and Coptic texts of Thomas to outline what I call a 'family tree' compositional procedure, whereby the Thomasine tradition was continually modified with each successive edition.

Between P.Oxy.654 and the Coptic text, several small changes have occurred within the tradition with wide theological significance. Saying 2 ('Let him who seeks...') describes the process of illumination from seeking to finding and beyond, but the emphasis in the Coptic is on the disjunctive character of finding, while the Greek text understands finding to be a far less disruptive consequence of seeking. The Greek of Saying 4 (old man/child) espouses an egalitarian, but mixed, community of first and last, while the Coptic testifies to the movement of the tradition toward an exclusive monasticism. Finally, Saying 5 of the Greek ('Recognize what is in your sight...') grounds the certainty of finding in the general resurrection of the dead through the addition of a new saying, while the more original Coptic lacks this reference to resurrection. P.Oxy.1 shows both signs of stability and a radical variation between the Coptic and Greek texts. The extant portion of Saying 26 (mote/beam) is a nearly verbatim duplicate compared to the Coptic. Saying 30 of the Greek ('Where there are three...') is highly different compared to the Coptic text. Not only do they have widely divergent meanings, but the latter half of the Greek saying has been transposed within the Coptic text. This indicates that sayings within the Thomasine tradition could have readily been relocated within the text with each edition. Saying 36 of P.Oxy.655 ('Do not worry...') has likewise been drastically rewritten by the Coptic text, which omits the Greek text's affirmation of God as the provider

of worldly needs to only record the bare injunction to not worry about clothing. Saying 39 (hidden keys of knowledge) is significant not for the similarity/difference between the Greek and Coptic, but as a test case for Thomas' indebtedness to his synoptic counterparts. The Thomasine saying appears to be indebted to Matthew 10.16b, 23.13, and Luke 11.52, alternating from Matthew to Luke, and then back to Matthew. Such an erratic level of oral or written dependence is best explained via a 'family tree' compositional model, whereby the inconsistent redactional procedure derives from Thomas' development over time. Having supported a 'family tree' compositional model on the basis of variation/stability between the Greek and Coptic texts, the final section inquires whether this procedure may be operative behind the Greek text toward Thomas' genesis. It is suggested that the ascription of the text to Thomas and the secrecy theme arose sometime after Thomas' origins. In all of these differences and similarities, the texts of Thomas testify to a 'data' interpretive tradition in *constant motion*, whose origins reach back into general synoptic timeframe occupied by Mt/Mk/Lk. As a fourth synoptic witness, Thomas demonstrates a fitting measure of indebtedness and independence relative to his synoptic counterparts.

Having justified the comparison of Thomas and Mt/Mk/Lk, Chapter Three proceeded to compare Matthew, Thomas, and Luke's versions of the parable of the lost sheep and the attitude toward history entailed by their 'data' and 'mural' interpretations. The Matthean parable occurs at the hinge point between a prior discourse about the perilous fate of 'little ones' in Matthew 18.1-9 and the subsequent discussion of church discipline in Matthew 18.15-35. To a question by the disciples concerning who is the greatest, Jesus responds by calling a Christian 'little one' forward and suggesting that they are to be emulated in their humility, though they are in danger of being led astray. The parable is then told as an illustration of the Father's care for 'little ones' who must not be despised by their fellow disciples. Matthew's 'mural' approach is an *exemplary* interpretation of the parable whereby the actions of the Father toward his lost sheep are an example to be followed. The Father, in his seeking after the one lost sheep, is posited as an ideal leader whom the disciples, past and present, must emulate in their care of 'little ones'. In the subsequent discourse concerning church discipline, Jesus outlines the specific actions the church (ἐκκλησία) must follow in its care of 'little ones', the lost brother who goes astray. The lost brother must be shown his or her sin and forgiven if he or she is to return to the fold. Within the broader narrative, it is clear that the five blocks of Jesus' extended teaching must be carried forward into the present by the disciples to the ends of the earth. For Matthew, the past of Jesus' teaching is maintained, but extends into the present through the continued mission of the church.



The Thomasine parable of the lost sheep falls within sayings that have been grouped according to a catchword association of the hidden and found motif. This context emphasizes the parable's imagery of finding, but does not immediately suggest how the parable itself should be understood. The task is then to interpret the parable within the broader corpus of Thomas, one that could lead to either a Christological reading, with the shepherd representing Christ, or an anthropological reading of the parable, where the shepherd symbolizes the Thomasine Christian's search for wisdom. Accordingly, the parable of the fisherman in Saying 8 is the most apt parallel to the parable of the lost sheep, despite some differences. If Saying 8 is a parable of election, Christ's selection of the lone, large (NOΔ) fish among many smaller fish, the parable of the lost sheep is a parable of salvation, narrating the costly journey of Jesus toward the lone Thomasine Christian who has separated him or herself from the church and is found by Jesus. A possible parallel exists in the parable of the hidden pearl in Saying 76, which might support an anthropological reading of the parable. But if the hidden pearl is ontologically distinct from the discarded merchandise, the sheep of the parable is both lost and large (NOΔ), quantitatively different from the other, smaller sheep. The wandering of the sheep away from the flock and its relative difference from the other sheep are best understood according to a Christological interpretation of the parable. In accordance with Thomas' 'data' approach to the Jesus tradition, the identity of the lost sheep is not identified and the reader is encouraged, if not required, to understand him or herself as this large, lost sheep. Comparing Thomas' 'data' approach with Matthew's 'mural' hermeneutic, both have a clear emphasis on the present-day significance of the parable, but the narrative of Matthew distinctly preserves the past origin of Jesus' teaching. Thomas' rendering of the parable betrays a *de-historicizing* tendency, whereby the past datum of Jesus' teaching is almost obscured entirely. The immediacy of Thomas' 'data' approach is achieved at the expense of the historical origins of Jesus' teachings.

If Matthew's 'mural' hermeneutic assumes an exemplary character for present-day Christians, Luke's 'mural' approach is *biographical*, maintaining a sharp distinction between past and present. The parable of the lost sheep falls within Luke as the first of a series of parables Jesus tells in response to the Pharisees and scribes' grumbling over Jesus' receiving and eating with tax collectors and sinners. Directed at the Pharisees-scribes, the parable is concerned with addressing their malcontent over Jesus' chosen table companions. By contrast, the disciples are not mentioned as recipients of the teaching until 16.1, when Jesus speaks 'also' to them. Jesus, the shepherd, has sought out the lost tax collector-sinners to bring them to repentance and he entreats the Pharisees-scribes to join with him and heaven to feast over their

return. Such an identification of the shepherd with Jesus, as opposed to the father, occurs principally through the strong parallel between Jesus' own actions within the narrative and the events of the parable. The meal scene of chapter 15 is one of three controversy scenes within Luke that follow the same pattern along a trajectory of increasing hostility between Jesus and the Pharisees-scribes. This confirms an association of Jesus with the shepherd and illustrates the way in which a parable and the narrative context can interface. As an apology for his actions and indictment against the Jewish leaders who grumble against him, the parable is not narrated with an eye toward its present-day application. It is particularly telling that, when the issue of table fellowship arises in Acts 10, Peter does not appeal to either the parable of the lost sheep or Jesus' own table fellowship practices. Unlike Matthew's exemplary 'mural' approach, Luke's biographical 'mural' approach confines the meaning of the parable of the lost sheep to the circumstances of Jesus' ministry. In this way, a 'mural' hermeneutic does not prescribe a single attitude toward the significance of history, but its historical orientation can function in a variety of ways.

It follows that the 'mural' approaches of Matthew and Luke have an inherent orientation to the past it describes. By contrast, Thomas' data approach to transmitting and interpreting the Jesus tradition exhibits de-historicizing tendencies, with almost no temporal restraints, thereby ensuring its modern-day significance. These tendencies are likewise displayed in the modern day 'data' and 'mural' interpreters, Rudolf Bultmann and Hans Frei. For Bultmann, Jesus tells the parable of the lost sheep as an illustration of the privilege of the poor and the folly of respectable people, a timeless contrast between two categories of people. More fundamentally, the inability of Bultmann's form criticism to determine the precise meaning of parables is indicative of the 'data' approach's limitations when applied to historical study. Frei does not offer a reading of the parable of the lost sheep, but Matthew and Luke's 'mural' approaches to the parable of the lost sheep confirm his suggestion that the narrative form makes inherent claims concerning the 'history-like' nature of its text.

Chapter Four turns to the issue of Christology and the interpretations of the parable of the tenants in the texts of Thomas, Mark, Matthew and Luke. The Thomasine parable falls within a trio of parables, with Sayings 62 and 66 forming their introduction and conclusion. As an introduction, Saying 62 divides insiders who are worthy of Jesus' mysteries and the outsiders from whom these mysteries are hidden. The following parables continue this insider/outsider divide by illustrating the unworthiness of the outsiders. Saying 63 tells of a rich man who seeks to preserve his life through the exercise of his worldly wealth. His unexpected death reveals such an endeavor to be folly. The parable of the wedding banquet in

Saying 64 depicts the unworthiness of businessmen and merchants who all decline the invitation to the places of the Father. In both these instances the characters of the parables reveal their unworthiness through their attachment to the world. Thomas' parable of the tenants in Saying 65 furthers this negative portrayal of those who are tied to worldly wealth. The good man who owns a field arranges a tenancy involving the reciprocal exchange of gifts; he gives the field to farmers and they are to give him a portion of its produce. But the tenants violate this equitable arrangement, rejecting the owner's requests through an escalation of violence against his servants. This downward spiral of violence culminates in the murder of the owner's son. Like the figures of the previous parables, the tenants demonstrate their unworthiness through their attachment to worldly wealth. While the appended cornerstone saying of Saying 66 might indicate a Christological reading of the parable of the tenants, this possibility is excluded in its present form. The saying has been separated from the parable and is instead to be understood as a distinct saying of Jesus. The rejected cornerstone which Jesus asks to be shown is thus Jesus' rejected teaching, highlighting and summarizing the theme of rejection in the previous three parables. If the parable was once understood Christologically in the Thomasine tradition, this possibility is explicitly excluded in its present form. This shift from Christology to ethical teaching is highly significant, since such an interpretive modification is possible through Thomas' 'data' approach.

The Markan parable falls within an extended discourse prompted by a question from the chief priest, scribes and elders concerning the authority by which Jesus acts. After a question concerning John the Baptist's authority, Jesus proceeds to tell the parable of the tenants. The description of this vineyard is dependent upon the parable of the vineyard in Isaiah 5.2 and is utilized by the Markan Jesus for its salvation-historical implications. Just as in Isaiah, the issue in both parables is the production of fruit by the nation of Israel to be given to God. But rather than a single visitation of the vineyard by God, as in Isaiah, the Markan parable introduces prophetic emissaries, who are mistreated by the tenants in increasingly hostile terms. The history of Israel is one of unmitigated violence and consistent rebellion against God. This history is carried forward into Jesus' ministry as the beloved son, Jesus, is sent to the nation to receive its fruit. The identification of Jesus as the beloved son of the parable occurs through the narrative's repeated identification of Jesus as the beloved son of God (Mk. 1.1, 1.11, 9.7). Jesus, the prophet, is none other than the son of YHWH, rejected by Israel and vindicated by God in his resurrection. The 'vineyard' will then be taken from the Jewish leaders and be given to another people. Within the broader narrative it becomes clear that the parable of the tenants is the centerpiece of Markan Christology. If Jesus' identity is

mysteriously concealed throughout the narrative (through the motif of the messianic secret), it is in the parable of the tenants where Mark's preferred Christological title, Son of God, is most clearly explained. The contrast between Mark and Thomas' interpretations of the parable is fairly obvious, but both are genuine readings of the parable, utilizing particular themes offered by the narrative world of the parable.

Matthew's version of the parable of the tenants continues Mark's own line of thought by sharpening and extending its salvation-historical implications. The setting for the parable is much the same as Mark, but the additional parable of the two sons more clearly underscores the themes of rejection and judgment. The Matthean parable narrates the history of the 'kingdom of God' from its foundation in the nation of Israel up to the present day of Jesus' ministry. The two groups of servants sent to the vineyard represent the prophets of Israel sent by God to receive the fruits of righteousness. The son of the owner is not a beloved son, but may still be understood to represent Jesus. Just as the son of the parable is cast out and then killed, Jesus likewise travels out from the city to be crucified. Like the many prophets before him, Jesus suffers a tragic death at the hands of violent men. The rejected son does not die in vain, but is vindicated by God through the resurrection. Matthew then states explicitly that the murder of Jesus will result in the destruction of the tenants and the transfer of the vineyard to another nation. This transfer is not one of 'supersessionism', but an extension of a genuinely Jewish identity to all the nations. The parable of the tenants becomes, within Matthew's 'mural' approach, the narrative summary of Jesus' ministry to Israel and the movement of salvation history from Israel to the church. Jesus is therefore the Jewish messiah sent by God for the benefit of the world.

Lacking the allusions to the parable of the vineyard of Isaiah 5, Luke's version of the parable of the tenants is surprisingly different from that of Matthew and Mark. Without this scriptural grounding, the parable of Luke fails to express the salvation-historical overtones of Matthew and Mark. Instead, the immediate backdrop of the parable is Jesus' own visitation to Jerusalem and his future prediction of its destruction. Jesus tells the parable to the people of Jerusalem as a straightforward illustration of their rejection of him and the doomed fate that awaits them. Following Mark's Christological association, the son, Jesus, has been sent by God to preach the fruit of repentance that they may receive him with contrition. Yet he is murdered by the tenants (Jerusalem), an act that will precipitate their destruction. The adjoined cornerstone saying is strongly underscored by Luke, connecting the resurrected cornerstone with a pronouncement of judgment enacted by the stone. Jesus is the stone by which all of humanity either stands or falls. Within the wider narrative, the parable of the tenants may be

said to be a sequel of the earlier parable of the fig tree. Moreover, the language of judgment used in the parable mirrors that of Jesus' prior prediction of the city's destruction (Lk. 19.43-44) and the later apocalyptic discourse (Lk. 21.5-36). Finally, the cornerstone saying is taken up in the proclamation of Peter to the Jewish leaders in Acts 4, the structure and themes of which seem to recapitulate the original telling of the parable of the tenants. Together, they outline Jesus' prophetic call to repentance to avoid the impending judgment, seen prophetically in the destruction of Jerusalem. In these ways, for Luke, the question of Jesus' identity is directly tied with his reception by others, in either repentance or judgment.

Comparing the versions of the parable of the tenants in Thomas, Mark, Matthew, and Luke, a few observations may be made about the role of these 'data' and 'mural' approaches concerning the question of Jesus' identity. A 'mural' approach enables a greater affinity between the activity of Jesus and his teachings, thereby placing issue of Christology to the fore. Conversely, a 'data' approach—combined with its de-historicizing tendencies and the lack of temporal events—does not as readily associate Jesus' teachings with his person. This is most clearly seen in the way in which an originally Christological parable like the parable of the tenants can be interpreted ethically. More broadly, a 'mural' approach places history at the core of who Jesus is. Following Frei, Jesus is who he is through both his intention-action and the agency of others. This structure of personhood is nascently kerygmatic. Since Jesus' identity is constituted by his relation to the world, this congruously coheres with the proclamation of Jesus' universal significance for the world. By contrast, a 'data' approach can only understand Jesus on the basis of his words, and the particularity of his personhood in time is irrelevant. Questions of Jesus' personhood can only be answered by a 'data' approach with great difficulty. In this way, a 'data' approach is inclined to understand Jesus simply as a preacher, or in Bultmann's estimation, 'the proclaimer [Verkündiger]'.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Implications

This study has ranged into a number of fields of study, from historical, to theological and hermeneutical inquiry. Within these various fields, several implications can be drawn. What implications does a 'family tree' compositional model have for the study of Thomas? What does Thomas' status as a fourth synoptic witness suggest about early Christianity? What does this study suggest about the nature of parables and their interpretation? Having identified

---

<sup>1</sup> Bultmann, *Theologie des neuen Testaments*, 35.

some of the inherent tendencies of the ‘data’ and ‘mural’ approaches over the issues of history and Christology, what are the relative values of these approaches for such topics? What advantages or disadvantages do each have when applied toward the questions of history and Christology? Finally, what implications does this have for present-day interpretive approaches to the Jesus tradition?

1. If the Thomasine family of texts testifies to a tradition that is in constant motion, then the use of the issue of Thomas’ dependence/independence upon his synoptic counterparts must be addressed on a case-by-case basis. If dependence upon Mt/Mk/Lk is found in some sayings, this level of indebtedness cannot be inferred in other sayings which show no obvious signs of indebtedness. Similarly, places of Thomas’ independence from Mt/Mk/Lk do not provide comprehensive evidence of an original ‘kernel’ of Thomas unaffected by his synoptic counterparts. Instead, Thomas was a highly adaptable, and therefore interactive, textual tradition within early Christianity. Some sayings were likely incorporated into its collection through its interaction with other traditions, others were modified by these other traditions, and still others resisted such a change, thereby preserving their independent character.<sup>2</sup>

2. The textual variants between the Greek and Coptic texts of Thomas exceed that which can be found in the canonical textual tradition. While some variants exist between the canonical witnesses that may be quite substantial at some points (the ending of Mark being a famous example), the sheer volume of textual witnesses to the canonical texts exponentially multiplies the number of possible variants to misleadingly suggest a greater fluidity of the tradition.<sup>3</sup> By comparison, there are only four extant texts of Thomas. Where these texts overlap, significant differences arise in a third of the sayings.<sup>4</sup> But more tellingly, comparing the equivalent sayings

---

<sup>2</sup> Though it is important not to conflate independence from the Mt/Mk/Lk with the *primitivity* of a given saying, since such a judgment depends upon the coherence of the saying with one’s reconstruction of the historical Jesus. On these grounds, the Gospel of Thomas is largely unreliable (see point 8 below).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Aland, ‘it is particularly noticeable that the Gospels, Acts, and Revelation stand apart from the rest of the New Testament with regard to the number of variants in the editions. This is due to the nature of the manuscript tradition: in the Gospels it reflects largely though not exclusively the great number of witnesses’. Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament: An Introduction to the Critical Editions and to the Theory and Practice of Modern Textual Criticism*, trans. Erroll F. Rhodes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 29-30.

<sup>4</sup> If noteworthy variation occurs in Sayings 2, 4, 5, 30, 36, and Sayings 7, 24, 29, 33, and 38 are omitted from the tally because of the amount of missing text, then 5/15 of the sayings are different between the Greek and Coptic texts.

between Thomas and canonical manuscript tradition,<sup>5</sup> none arise to the level of significance of variants between the Greek and Coptic texts of Thomas. While the Coptic of Thomas omits the final clause ‘καὶ οἱ ἔσχατοι πρῶτοι’, this does not occur in any of the canonical variants: Matthew 19.30 has no variants recorded; Matthew 20.16 preserves the full saying, with several manuscripts (C D K N W Γ Δ Θ Ϝ<sup>1,13</sup> 33, 565, 579, 700, 892<sup>c</sup>. 1241 ℣ latt sy mae bo<sup>pt</sup>) adjoining a duplication of Matthew 22.14, ‘πολλοὶ γὰρ εἰσιν κλητοί, ὀλίγοι δὲ ἐκλεκτοί’; Mark 10.31 has no significant variants; and Luke 13.30 likewise has no differences among its witnesses. Similarly, neither of the hidden/revealed pairings (Mt. 10.26, Lk. 12.2) ground this saying, as the Greek of Thomas does, in a future belief in the resurrection. Finally, none of the canonical witnesses (Mt.6.25-32, Lk. 12.22-30) omit any appreciable part of Jesus’ teachings on being anxious, let alone the drastic truncation found in Saying 36 of the Coptic text of Thomas. In each of these instances, the sayings of Jesus are transmitted with negligible variation, contrasting sharply with Thomas’ own variants. This difference seems to derive, in part, from the nature of the Thomasine tradition. By emphasizing the present-day significance of its saying, the Thomasine tradition creates an interpretive context that encourages its contents to be readily adapted to contemporary concerns.

3. If Thomas is to be considered a fourth synoptic witness to Jesus, it thus follows that early Christian gospel writing was not a uniformly narrative tradition moving from Mark to Matthew and Luke, culminating with the close of the canon in the Gospel of John. Jesus’ words were recorded and transmitted through a variety of mediums and for a variety of purposes, reflecting the inherent hermeneutical choices of their authors.

4. The Jesus tradition did not demand a single interpretive approach to Jesus’ teachings and actions. The tradition proved to be incredibly versatile, able to be integrated and employed within a variety of contexts. This bequeathed to Christianity a hermeneutical ambiguity such that Jesus’ teachings could have been understood in a ‘data’ manner, as in the case of Thomas and many writings of the Apostolic Fathers, or in the ‘mural’ approach of the canonical texts. In many ways, this ambiguity has persisted within church history right up into the present day as both Bultmann and Frei attest to the divergent interpretive approaches available to the modern interpreter.

---

<sup>5</sup> As recorded by Nestle-Aland, ed., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th Revised ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012).

5. This study also shows a number of ways in which a parable depends upon its surrounding 'data' or 'mural' context for the narrative world of the parable to assume metaphorical significance. Depending upon the way in which a parable is contextualized, it can have a wide variety of possible meanings. This is not to suggest that a parable is entirely polyvalent. For example, without drastic revision of the parable of the lost sheep, it would be difficult, if not impossible for the parable to be told in such a way that the ninety-nine sheep are the 'heroes' of the story. But it does suggest that a parable offers a range of interpretive possibilities in accordance with the structure of its drama. Likewise, a parable cannot be said to straightforwardly have a single meaning, nor can its meaning be reduced to only having a single point. The relative simplicity or complexity of a parable's interpretation depends instead on the variety of ways it can interface with its surrounding context.

6. This study has found that one's hermeneutical approach to the Jesus tradition is not value-neutral. The selection of a hermeneutical approach entails several inherent tendencies which one may or may not be aware of from the outset. These tendencies are not hard-and-fast rules, such that the selection of a hermeneutical method automatically predisposes a certain interpretation, only that these chosen methods exert a hermeneutical pressure toward particular outcomes. Like the selection and utilization of a tool from a tool chest, some hermeneutical approaches are better suited than others for the desired interpretive goal.

7. When it comes to a historical study of Jesus, the findings here suggest that a discarding of the narrative framework of the gospels in the service of history paradoxically leads one away from a historical understanding of Jesus' teachings. A 'data' approach in the service of historical study may be able to approximate the general meaning of a given saying of Jesus, but the precise point of a teaching, directed to specific individuals in response to a particular issue, is inaccessible when the narrative contexts of teachings is discarded. Historical study under the auspices of a 'data' approach inevitably attempts to re-contextualize Jesus' teaching within a reconstructed historical framework, such as the kingdom of God, but this can only suggest one possible *general* meaning of the teaching and still fails to produce a genuinely historical understanding of the teaching. Instead, if one wishes to inquire about the specific point of a given teaching and its place within history, then the narrative framework proves to be essential. Because the narrative presentations of the gospels inherently preserve their orientation to the past, historical inquiry must be reformulated in such a way that its desire to



understand the world behind the narrative text does not forsake, in the process, the narrative world itself.

8. It follows that the dogmatic separation of the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith breaks down, since the narrative presentation of Jesus indivisibly holds together his historical identity with his being for others, to be received in faith. We therefore do not, and cannot, have a historical Jesus who is somehow other than the Jesus described in the narrative without sacrificing knowledge of the specific, historical point of his teaching or action, and by extension his historical identity.

9. If a 'data' hermeneutic is inappropriate for historical study, the use of the Gospel of Thomas for this purpose is likewise inadequate. Beyond the difficulties that arise through the fluidity of Thomas' composition history and the inability to determine with any precision its original 'kernel', Thomas does not present itself as a repository of the historical Jesus, but the voice of the Living Jesus in the present and its selection of a 'data' approach to the Jesus tradition coheres with and establishes this underlying purpose. To read Thomas historically is to read it against-the-grain of the text and to unwittingly incorporate Thomas' de-historicizing tendency into one's historical portrait of Jesus. If one were to determine that a particular form of Thomas is independent of his synoptic counterparts, for example Saying 8 and the parable of the fisherman, there is nothing to suggest in Thomas how this parable was understood historically since the identity of the large fish chosen by the fisherman is likely the Thomasine Christian who has been chosen by Jesus out of the thousand and ten thousand (Saying 23). This orientation to the present is inseparable from the particular form of Saying 8 testified by Thomas. Thus, the selection of the form of Thomas' sayings for historical purposes cannot overcome the inherent ahistorical tendency of its hermeneutical approach.

10. This study suggests that the narrative framework of Jesus' life provides more fertile ground for Christological reflection than an exclusive study of his words apart from such a contextualization. The Jesus of a 'data' approach turns out to be a Jesus without any realistic individuality. The identity of Jesus the preacher remains unknowably cloaked and hidden. Like a Twitter account without an avatar or profile, the Jesus of a 'data' approach lies somewhere beyond the available information, devoid of any unique or genuine personhood. If Jesus is only known by his teaching then his identity as 'Jesus' is mostly incidental and it does not genuinely matter who the speaker of these sayings is. This may seem like a hyperbolic

claim, given that the 'Jesus said' format of Thomas is fundamental to its genre, but, as Jens Schröter has suggested, the sayings traditions of Jesus employed by Paul and elsewhere (such as James, 1 Peter, and the *Didache*), were presented as *anonymous* sayings.<sup>6</sup> This anonymity seems to itself be the product of a 'data', sayings approach, since the lack of biographical material encourages an interpretation of the sayings apart from Jesus' personhood. By contrast, a 'mural' approach to the Jesus tradition maintains an indissoluble link between the person and his teaching as the unique identity of Jesus is outlined through the story of his life. In this way, it is the narrative form which proves to be foundational to Christological inquiry since it asserts the unsubstitutable nature of his personhood. The question, 'Who was Jesus?', can only be answered by way of narrative and its witness to Jesus' life of teachings and actions within history. By placing the identity of Jesus inextricably within the course of history, a narrative approach has an anti-Docetic stance. The Jesus of narrative is a genuinely human person, subject to the restraints of time, history, and the activity of others. Within the narrative's confession that Jesus' earthly identity is also grounded in his filial relation to the Father, the narrative approach to the Jesus tradition avoids an adoptionist Christology<sup>7</sup> and further demands that the identity of God cannot be abstracted from history and the world. The triune being of God constituted by his decision of election in the salvation of the world entails his becoming human in the world and history. Moreover, the narration of Jesus' activity within the world, rather than robbing Jesus of his universal significance, actually furnishes and ensures his universal significance for the world.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> 'It is also to be taken into account that in early Christianity the synoptic Jesus tradition could also be handed down elsewhere without being attributed to Jesus, and this could, in fact, also happen post-synoptically, as, for example, James, 1 Peter, and the *Didache* attest... the tracing back of the early Christian sayings tradition to Jesus was not mandatory and was carried out in a thoroughgoing manner for the first time in the synoptic Jesus narratives. Thus, the question of whether a tradition originated from the earthly Jesus was not a pressing problem for Paul or elsewhere in early Christianity. Rather, it was important for Paul to answer for his own decisions with respect to the early Christian tradition known to him, which he regarded as a whole as authorized by the κύριος. With this a characteristic feature of the early Christian sayings tradition is grasped, which is not only true for Paul and which is of considerable importance for determining the relationship between sayings tradition and narrative tradition. The sayings tradition could also have existed anonymously because without biographical integration it served as a living and variously applicable and extendable basis with which early Christianity created for itself a tradition of its own'. Schröter, *From Jesus to the New Testament*, 83.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Watson, 'A narrative Christology might wish to claim that the identity of Jesus as Son of God is as yet empty, potentiality rather than actuality; only when this theologically laden acclamation is repeated by the centurion at the cross does it emerge that Jesus' filial relation to God consists (and consists entirely) in his following the path to Golgotha that God has determined for him. But that would be to counter the docetic tendency in Christology with adoptionism... A solution to this difficulty may be found in the observation that the father-son relation to which Mark 1.11 appeals does not consist *solely* in the narration of its history'. Francis Watson, 'Literary Approaches to the Gospels: A Theological Assessment,' *Theology*, no. 99 (1996), 130.

<sup>8</sup> As Barth has said, 'It is in the particular fact and the particular way that Jesus Christ is very God, very man, and very God-man that He works, and he works in the fact and only in the fact that He is this One and not

11. The contrast between the ‘data’ approach of Thomas and the ‘mural’ approaches of the Matthew, Mark, and Luke raises the question of the canonicity of these texts. The decision against Thomas through the church’s selection and exclusive use certain texts may have been made on theological grounds, but it can also be retrospectively seen as a decision against Thomas’ ‘data’ approach and a decision in favor of narrative as the most appropriate way to understand the life and person of Jesus. While Thomas may be historically viewed as a fourth synoptic witness to Jesus, the canonical decision precludes such an association within the church.

12. If one interpretive approach, the ‘mural’ hermeneutics of Matthew/Mark/Luke, has been deemed to be canonical by the church and the ‘data’ approach of Thomas resides outside of the canon, this may imply that the canonical decision entails a decision on the way in which the canonical texts should be read today within the life of the church and its continued practice of preaching and teaching. The Jesus of narrative cannot be read in such a way that the narrative framework of this teaching is set aside. Therefore a narrative reading of the gospels is most proper to Christian theology precisely because of the selection of these narrative texts and the exclusion of Thomas’ data approach.

As noted in Chapter One, Hans Frei’s *Identity of Jesus* suggested that a narrative reading of narrative gospels rested upon an *a priori* belief in a high doctrine of scripture. Frei would later more fully articulate why a narrative reading was most appropriate, grounding his argument for the ‘literal sense’ of scripture upon the church’s practice: ‘The rules—the formal or, more likely, informal rules that the members of the community follow with regard to the reading of the sacred text—are most likely to have been learned in or by application... In the process of developing these rules in the West, in Western Christendom in particular, one guideline came to be basic: Whenever possible, use the literal sense.’<sup>9</sup> My claim here takes his position further to suggest that a narrative reading is founded upon the church’s own canonical decision, which then establishes its interpretive practices. So while Frei came to believe that his own insistence upon narrative interpretation was itself historically conditioned, and therefore fails to claim to genuine objectivity, it is more

---

another. His being as this One is his history, and His history is this His being. This is the truth with must light up the doctrine of reconciliation as Christology’. Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, 128.

<sup>9</sup> Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, 14. For more on Frei’s altered position, see: Higton, *Christ, Providence, and History: Hans W. Frei’s Public Theology*, 177-213.

proper to say that a narrative hermeneutic is instead conditioned by the church's selection of its canonical texts.

Because of the pressures to make Jesus' words contemporary for the congregation, a 'data' approach to the gospels is a tempting option, as its de-historicizing tendencies enable greater present-day interpretive possibilities. But the canonical decision suggests that this temptation should be resisted, lest one preach an anonymous Jesus comparable to the Gospel of Thomas. Instead, the integrity of the narrative should be maintained even as one moves toward present-day application. Matthew and Luke offer two divergent models for how the past text is to be appropriated, reflecting their implied different beliefs concerning the task and content of preaching. While Matthew encourages a direct application of Jesus' words into the present, for Luke the church's preaching is the proclamation of the *kerygma*, narrating the life of Jesus in order to proclaim the saving events of his death and resurrection.

## Bibliography

- Aland, Kurt, and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament: An Introduction to the Critical Editions and to the Theory and Practice of Modern Textual Criticism*, trans. E. F. Rhodes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987).
- Allison, Dale C., *The Jesus Tradition in Q* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1997).
- , *Constructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination, and History* (London: SPCK, 2010).
- Arnal, William E., 'The Parable of the Tenants and the Class Consciousness of the Peasantry', in S. G. Wilson and M. Desjardins (eds.), *Text and Artifact in the Religions of Mediterranean Antiquity: Essays in Honor of Peter Richardson* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2000), 135-57.
- Attridge, Harold W., 'The Original Text of Gos. Thom., Saying 30,' *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 16 (1979), 153-57.
- , 'Appendix: the Greek Fragments', in B. Layton (ed.), *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2-7: Gospel According to Thomas, Gospel According to Philip, Hypostasis of the Archons, and Indexes*. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989), 96-128.
- Baarda, Tjitze, "'The Cornerstone': an Aramaism in the Diatessaron and the Gospel of Thomas?,' *Novum Testamentum* 37, no. 3 (1995), 285-300.
- , 'The Gospel of Thomas and the Old Testament,' *Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association* 26 (2003), 1-28.
- Bacon, B.W., *Studies in Matthew* (New York City: Henry Holt, 1930).
- Bailey, Kenneth E., *Jacob & the Prodigal: How Jesus Retold Israel's Story* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003).
- Barth, Karl, *Evangelical Theology: an Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979).
- , *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, trans. G. T. Thomson and H. Knight, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, Vol. IV/1 (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010).
- Bateman, Herbert W. I. V., 'Defining the Titles "Christ" and "Son of God" in Mark's Narrative Presentation of Jesus,' *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50, no. 3 (2007), 537-59.
- Bauckham, Richard, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

- Bauer, David R., *Structure of Matthew's Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Decatur: Almond Press, 1989).
- Blomberg, Craig L., *Interpreting the Parables* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, Second ed, 2012).
- Bock, D.L., *Luke*, Vol. 2: 9:51-24:53 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996).
- Bockmuehl, Markus, *Simon Peter in Scripture and Memory: The New Testament Apostle in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2012).
- Bornkamm, Günther, *Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. I. McLuskey, F. McLuskey and J. M. Robinson (London: Hodder and Stoughton Limited, 1960).
- Boucher, Madeleine, *The Mysterious Parable: A Literary Study*, CBQMS (Washington D.C.: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1977).
- Bousset, Wilhelm, *Kyrios Christos: A History of the Belief in Christ from the Beginnings of Christianity to Irenaeus*, trans. J. E. Steely (New York: Abingdon Press, 5th ed, 1970).
- , *Kyrios Christos: A History of the Belief in Christ from the Beginnings of Christianity to Irenaeus* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2013).
- Bovon, François, *Luke 3: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 19:28-24:53*, trans. J. Crouch, ed. H. Koester, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012).
- Brooke, George J., '4Q500 1 and the Use of Scripture in the Parable of the Vineyard,' *Dead Sea Discoveries* 2, no. 3 (1995), 268-94.
- Bruner, Frederick Dale, *Matthew: The Churchbook, Matthew 13-28* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2004).
- Bucur, Bogdan G., 'Matt 18:10 in early Christology and pneumatology: a contribution to the study of Matthean Wirkungsgeschichte,' *Novum Testamentum* 49, no. 3 (2007), 209-31.
- Bultmann, Rudolf, *Jesus, Die Unsterblichen. Die geistigen Heroen der Menschheit in ihrem Leben und Wirken* (Berlin: Deutsche Bibliothek Berlin, 1926).
- , *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2 ed, 1931).
- , *Jesus and the Word*, trans. L. P. Smith and E. H. Lantero (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934).
- , 'Das Problem der Hermeneutik,' *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 47 (1950), 47-69.
- , *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. K. Grobel, 2 vols, Vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951).
- , *Die Erforschung der synoptischen Evangelien* (Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1966).

- , *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. J. Marsh (New York: Harper & Row, 1976).
- , *Theologie des neuen Testaments* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1977).
- Bultmann, Rudolf, and Karl Kundsinn, *Form Criticism*, trans. F. C. Grant (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1962 (1934)).
- Burridge, Richard A., *What Are the Gospels?: A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, Second ed, 2004).
- Byrskog, Samuel, *Story as History - History as Story*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000).
- , 'Introduction', in W. H. Kelber and S. Byrskog (eds.), *Jesus in Memory: Traditions in Oral and Scribal Perspectives* (Baylor: Baylor University Press, 2009),
- Cameron, Ron, 'Mythmaking and Intertextuality in Early Christianity', in E. A. Castelli and H. Taussig (eds.), *Reimagining Christian Origins: A Colloquium Honoring Burton L. Mack* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996),
- Carrez, M., 'Quelques aspects Christologiques de l'Évangile de Thomas', in F. v. Segbroeck (ed.), *The Four Gospels 1992: Festschrift Frans Neirynck* (Leuven: University Press/Peeters, 1992), 2263-76.
- Carroll, J.T., *Luke: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012).
- Chae, Y. S., *Jesus as the Eschatological Davidic Shepherd: Studies in the Old Testament, Second Temple Judaism, and in the Gospel of Matthew* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006).
- Chatman, S.B., *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980).
- Childs, Brevard, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (London: SCM, 1992).
- Chrysostom, John *Homiliae In Matthaem*, ed. J. P. Migne, Vol. LVII, Patrologia Graeca (Paris, 1839).
- Clement, *Clementis Alexandrini opera quae Exstant Omnia*, ed. J. P. Migne, Patrologiae Graecae (Paris, 1857).
- Collins, Adela Yarbro, 'Mark and His Readers: The Son of God among Jews,' *Harvard Theological Review* 92, no. 4 (1999), 393-408.
- , 'Mark and His Readers: The Son of God among Greeks and Romans,' *Harvard Theological Review* 93, no. 2 (2000), 85-100.
- , *Mark: A Commentary*, ed. H. W. Attridge, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007).

- Conzelmann, Hans, *The Theology of Saint Luke*, trans. G. Buswell (London: Faber and Faber, 1961).
- Craddock, Fred B., *Luke* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990).
- Crossan, J. D., *Four Other Gospels: Shadows on the Contours of Canon* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985).
- , *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985).
- , *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991).
- Crum, W. E., *A Coptic Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939).
- Davies, Stevan L., *The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Wisdom* (New York: Seabury Press, 1983).
- , *The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Wisdom* (Oregon House: Bardic Press, 2nd ed, 2005).
- Davies, W. D., and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, III vols, Vol. II, ICC (London: T&T Clark, 1991).
- , *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, III vols, Vol. III (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997).
- Davis, Joshua B., 'Introduction', *The Identity of Jesus Christ: The Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2013), xxi-xl.
- Dawes, Gregory W., *The Historical Jesus Question: The Challenge of History to Religious Authority* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).
- De Moor, Johannes C., 'The Targumic Background of Mark 12:1-12: the Parable of the Wicked Tenants,' *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 29, no. 1 (1998), 63-80.
- DeConick, April D., *Recovering the Original Gospel of Thomas* (London: T&T Clark, 2005).
- , *The Original Gospel of Thomas in Translation* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006).
- Dehandschutter, B., 'La parabole des vigneron homicides (Mc. XII, 1-12) et l'évangile selon Thomas', in M. Sabbe (ed.), *L'évangile selon Marc: Tradition et rédaction* (Gembloux: Duculot, 1974), 287-97.
- Demson, David E., *Hans Frei and Karl Barth: Different Ways of Reading Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).
- Dibelius, Martin, *Die Formgeschichte des Evangeliums* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1919).



- , *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, trans. M. Ling (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1956).
- Dodd, C. H., *Parables of the Kingdom* (London: Nisbet & Co. Ltd., 1935).
- Drury, John, *The Parables in the Gospels: History and Allegory* (New York: Crossroad, 1985).
- Dunn, James D. G., 'The Messianic Secret in Mark', in C. M. Tuckett (ed.), *The Messianic Secret* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 116-31.
- , *Jesus Remembered: Christianity in the Making* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).
- Ehrman, Bart D., *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).
- , *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2nd ed, 2011).
- Eisele, Wilfried, *Welcher Thomas?* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).
- Esler, P. F., 'Table Fellowship as a Literary Motif in the Gospel of Luke,' *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106 (1987), 613-38.
- Fieger, Michael, *Das Thomasevangelium: Einleitung, Kommentar und Systematik* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1992).
- Fitzmyer, J.A., 'The Oxyrhynchus Logoi of Jesus and the Coptic Gospel according to Thomas,' *Theological Studies* 20 (1959), 505-61.
- , *Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV* (Garden City: Doubleday Religious Publishing Group, 1985).
- , *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).
- Flusser, David, *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1988).
- Foster, Paul, *Community, Law and Mission in Matthew's Gospel*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament II (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004).
- France, R.T., *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).
- Franklin, Eric, *Luke: Interpreter of Paul, Critic of Matthew* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994).
- Frei, Hans, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974).
- , *Types of Christian Theology*, ed. G. Hunsinger and W. C. Placher (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

- , 'The "Literal Reading" of Biblical Narrative in the Christian Tradition: Does It Stretch or Will It Break?', in G. Hunsinger and W. C. Placher (eds.), *Theology and Narrative: Selected Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 117-52.
- , *The Identity of Jesus: the Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology* (Eugene: Cascade Books, Updated and Expanded ed, 2013).
- Fuchs, Ernst, *Studies of the Historical Jesus*, trans. A. Scobie, Studies in Biblical Theology (Naperville: Alec R. Allenson, Inc., 1964).
- Funk, Robert. W., *Funk on Parables: Collected Essays* (Santa Rosa: Polebridge Press, 2006).
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg, *Truth and Method* (London: Continuum, Second Revised ed, 2004).
- Gärtner, Beril, *The Theology of the Gospel of Thomas* (London: Collins, 1961).
- Gathercole, Simon, *The Pre-existent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).
- , 'Luke in the Gospel of Thomas,' *New Testament Studies* 57, no. 01 (2011), 114-44.
- , *The Composition of the Gospel of Thomas: Original Language and Influences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
- , 'Named Testimonia to the Gospel of Thomas: An Expanded Inventory and Analysis,' *Harvard Theological Review* 105, no. 1 (2012), 53-89.
- , *The Gospel of Thomas: Introduction and Commentary*, ed. S. E. Porter and W. J. Porter, Vol. 11, TENT (Leiden: Brill, 2014).
- Gerhardsson, Birger, *Memory and Manuscript: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity* (Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1961).
- , 'If We Do Not Cut the Parables Out of Their Frames,' *New Testament Studies* 37, no. 3 (1991), 321-35.
- Globe, Alexander, 'The Caesarean Omission of the Phrase "Son of God" in Mark 1:1,' *Harvard Theological Review* 75, no. 2 (1982), 209-18.
- Goodacre, Mark, *Thomas and the Gospels: The Making of an Apocryphal Text* (London: SPCK, 2012).
- Goulder, Michael D., *Luke: A New Paradigm*, Vol. II, JSNT Supplement Series (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989).
- Grant, Robert M., and David Noel Freedman, *The Secret Sayings of Jesus* (London and Glasgow: Collins Press, 1960).
- Green, J.B., *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
- , *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997).

- Gregory, A., *The Reception of Luke and Acts in the Period Before Irenaeus: Looking for Luke in the Second Century* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).
- Gregory, A., and C.K. Rowe, *Rethinking the Unity and Reception of Luke and Acts* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2010).
- Grenfell, Bernard P., and Arthur S. Hunt, *Logoi Iesou: Sayings of Our Lord from an Early Greek Papyrus Discovered and Edited, with Translation and Commentary* (London: H. Frowde, 1897).
- , *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri: Part IV* (Oxford: Horace Hart, 1904).
- Grindheim, Sigurd, *Christology in the Synoptic Gospels: God Or God's Servant* (London: T&T Clark, 2012).
- Guillaumont, A., et al., *The Gospel According to Thomas: Coptic Text Established and Translated* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1959).
- Gundry, R.H., *Matthew: a Commentary on his Handbook for a Mixed Church Under Persecution* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).
- Harrington, D.J., *The Gospel of Matthew* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991).
- Hauerwas, Stanley, *Matthew*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2007).
- Hedrick, Charles W., *Many Things in Parables: Jesus and his Modern Critics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004).
- , *Unlocking the Secrets of the Gospel According to Thomas: A Radical Faith for a New Age* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2010).
- Heil, John Paul, *The Meal Scenes in Luke-Acts: An Audience-Oriented Approach* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999).
- Hengel, Martin, 'Das Gleichnis von den Weingärtner. Mc 12,1-12 im Lichte der Zenonpapyri und der rabbinischen Gleichnisse,' *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche* 59 (1968), 1-39.
- Herzog, William R., *Parables as Subversive Speech: Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994).
- Higton, Mike, *Christ, Providence, and History: Hans W. Frei's Public Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2004).
- Hultgren, A.J., *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).
- Hurtado, L. W., *The Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts and Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

- , 'The Greek Fragments of "The Gospel of Thomas" as Artefacts: Papyrological Observations on P.Oxy.1, P.Oxy.654, and P.Oxy.655', in J. Frey, E. E. Popkes and J. Schröter (eds.), *Das Thomasevangelium: Entstehung-Rezeption-Theologie* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 19-32.
- , 'Interactive Diversity: A Proposed Model of Christian Origins,' *Journal of Theological Studies* 64, no. 2 (2013), 445-62.
- , 'Fashions, Fallacies and Future Prospects in New Testament Studies,' *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 36, no. 4 (2014), 299-324.
- Irenaeus. "Adversus Haereses."
- Isenberg, Wesley W., 'Introduction to the Gospel According to Philip', in B. Layton (ed.), *Nag Hammadi Codex II,2-7* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989), 131-39.
- Iverson, Kelly R., 'Jews, Gentiles, and the Kingdom of God: the Parable of the Wicked Tenants in Narrative Perspective (Mark 12:1-12),' *Biblical Interpretation* 20, no. 3 (2012), 305-35.
- Jeremias, Joachim, *The Parables of Jesus*, trans. S. H. Hooke (London: SCM Press, Second Revised ed, 1972).
- Johnson, E. S., 'Mark 15,39 and the So-Called Confession of the Roman Centurion,' *Biblica* 81, no. 3 (2000), 406-13.
- Johnson, Luke T., *The Acts of the Apostles*, ed. D. J. Harrington, Sacra Pagina Series (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1992).
- Johnson, Steven R., 'The Hidden/Revealed Saying in the Greek and Coptic Versions of Gos. Thom. 5 & 6,' *Novum Testamentum* 44, no. 2 (2002), 176-85.
- Jülicher, Adolf, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu: zwei Teile in einem Band* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1969).
- Jüngel, Eberhard, *God's Being is in Becoming: The Trinitarian Being of God in the Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. J. Webster (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001).
- , *Paulus und Jesus: eine Untersuchung zur Präzisierung der Frage nach dem Ursprung der Christologie* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004).
- Käsemann, Ernst, 'Blind Alleys in the 'Jesus of History' Controversy', *New Testament Questions of Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 23-65.
- , 'The Problem of the Historical Jesus', *Essay on New Testament Themes* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 15-47.
- Kay, James F., *Christus Praesens: A Reconsideration of Rudolf Bultmann's Christology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

- Kelber, Werner H., *The Oral and Written Gospel: The Hermeneutics of Speaking and Writing in the Synoptic Tradition, Mark, Paul and Q* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).
- Kenyon, Frederic G., *The Palaeography of Greek Papyri* (London: Clarendon Press, 1899).
- Kimball, Charles A., *Jesus' Exposition of the Old Testament in Luke's Gospel*, JSNT Supplement Series (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994).
- Kingsbury, J.D., *The Parables of Jesus in Matthew 13: A Study in Redaction-Criticism* (London: SPCK, 1976).
- Kingsbury, Jack Dean, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom* (London: SPCK, 1975).
- , *Matthew As Story* (Philadelphia: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2nd ed, 1988).
- Klauck, H.J., *Allegorie und Allegorese in synoptischen Gleichnistexten* (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 1978).
- Klauck, Hans-Josef, *Apocryphal Gospels: An Introduction* (London: T&T Clark, 2003).
- Kloppenborg, John S., 'Isaiah 5:1-7, The Parable of the Tenants and Vineyard Leases on Papyrus', in S. G. Wilson and M. Desjardins (eds.), *Text and Artifact in the Religions of Mediterranean Antiquity: Essays in Honor of Peter Richardson* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2000),
- , 'Egyptian Viticultural Practices and the Citation of Isa 5:1-7 in Mark 12:1-9,' *Novum Testamentum* 44, no. 2 (2002), 134-59.
- , *The Tenants in the Vineyard: Ideology, Economics, and Agrarian Conflict in Jewish Palestine*, Vol. 195, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006).
- , 'A New Synoptic Problem: Mark Goodacre and Simon Gathercole on Thomas,' *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 36, no. 3 (2014), 199-239.
- Kloppenborg, John S., and Callie Callon, 'The Parable of the Shepherd and the Transformation of Pastoral Discourse,' *Early Christianity* 1, no. 2 (2010), 218-60.
- Knight, Jonathan, *Luke's Gospel* (London: Routledge, 1998).
- Koester, Helmut, *Ancient Christian Gospels: Their History and Development* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1990).
- Koskeniemi, Erkki, 'Forgotten guardians and Matthew 18:10,' *Tyndale Bulletin* 61, no. 1 (2010), 119-29.
- Kretzer, Armin, *Die Herrschaft der Himmel und die Söhne des Reiches: eine redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zum Basileiabegriff und Basileiaverständnis im*

- Matthäus-evangelium*, Vol. 10, Stuttgarter Biblische Monographien (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1971).
- Kruger, Michael J., 'Early Christian Attitudes toward the Reproduction of Texts', in C. E. Hill and M. J. Kruger (eds.), *The Early Texts of the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 63-80.
- Kümmel, Werner Georg, 'Das Gleichnis von den bösen Weingärtnern (Mk 12,1-9)', *Heilsgeschehen und Geschichte; Gesammelte Aufsätze, 1933-1964* (Marburg: Elwert, 1965), 207-17.
- Lambdin, Thomas O., 'The Gospel According to Thomas', in B. Layton (ed.), *Nag Hammadi Codex II,2-7: Gospel According to Thomas, Gospel According to Philip, Hypostasis of the Archons, and Indexes* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989), 53-93.
- Lavin, M.A., *The Place of Narrative: Mural Decoration in Italian Churches, 431-1600* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
- Layton, Bentley, *A Coptic Grammar: with Chrestomathy and Glossary, Sahidic Dialect* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 3rd, Revised ed, 2011).
- Le Donne, Anthony, *The Historiographical Jesus: Memory, Typology, and the Son of David* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2009).
- Lee, David, *Luke's Stories of Jesus: Theological Reading of Gospel Narrative and the Legacy of Hans Frei* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).
- Lefort, L.Th., *Concordance du Nouveau Testament sahidique, I. Les mots d'origine grecque*, Vol. 124, Subsidia, 1, CSCO (Louvain: Imprimerie orientale L. Durbecq, 1950).
- Lemcio, Eugene, *The Past of Jesus in the Gospels*, Vol. 68, SNTSMS (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
- Liddell, H. G., and Robert Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon, Founded upon the Seventh Edition of Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, Seventh ed, 1945).
- Liebenberg, Jacobus, *The Language of the Kingdom and Jesus: Parable, Aphorism, and Metaphor in the Sayings Material Common to the Synoptic Tradition and the Gospel of Thomas* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2001).
- , 'To Know How to Find. To Find Without Knowing: Wisdom in the Gospel of Thomas,' *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 59, no. 1 (2003), 99-120.
- Lincoln, Bruce, 'Thomas-Gospel and Thomas-Community: A New Approach to a Familiar Text,' *Novum Testamentum* 19 (1977), 65-76.

- Linnemann, Eta, *Gleichnisse Jesu: Einführung und Auslegung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, Third ed, 1964).
- Luijendijk, AnneMarie, 'Jesus says: "There Is Nothing Buried That Will Not Be Raised". A Late-Antique Shroud with Gospel of Thomas Logion 5 in Context,' *Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum* 15, no. 3 (2011), 389-410.
- Luomanen, Petri, *Recovering Jewish-Christian Sects and Gospels* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).
- Luther, Martin, 'Preface to the New Testament [1552, Revised 1546]', in J. Pelikan and H. T. Lehmann (eds.), *Luther's Works, Vol. 6* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955-76),
- Luz, Ulrich, *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew*, trans. J. B. Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
- , *Matthew 8-20: A Commentary*, trans. J. E. Crouch, ed. H. Koester, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001).
- , *Matthew 21-28: A Commentary*, trans. J. E. Crouch, ed. H. Koester (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005).
- Malina, B.J., and R.L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).
- Marcus, Joel, 'Identity and Ambiguity in Markan Christology', in B. R. Gaventa and R. B. Hays (eds.), *Seeking the Identity of Jesus, a Pilgrimage* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 133-47.
- , *Mark 8-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Vol. 27A, Anchor Bible Commentary (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).
- Marxsen, W., *Introduction to the New Testament: An Approach to its Problems*, trans. G. Buswell (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1968).
- Ménard, Jacques- É., *L'Évangile selon Thomas* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975).
- Mendez-Moratalla, Fernando, *The Paradigm of Conversion in Luke* (London: T&T Clark, 2004).
- Merkle, Benjamin L., 'The Meaning of 'Ekklēsia in Matthew 16:18 and 18:17,' *Bibliotheca Sacra* 167, no. 667 (2010), 281-91.
- Moltmann, Jürgen, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1977).
- Morrice, W. G., 'The Parable of the Tenants and the Gospel of Thomas,' *The Expository Times* 98 (1987), 104-07.

- Neale, D.A., *None But the Sinners: Religious Categories in the Gospel of Luke* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991).
- Neill, Stephen, and N.T. Wright, *The Interpretation of the New Testament: 1861-1986* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).
- Nestle-Aland, ed. *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th Revised ed, (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012).
- Niebuhr, H. Richard, *Christ and Culture* (London: Faber and Faber, 1952).
- Nolland, John, *Luke 18:35-24:53*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1993).
- Oesterley, W.O.E., *The Gospel Parables in the Light of their Jewish background* (London: SPCK, 1936).
- Olmstead, Wesley G., *Matthew's Trilogy of Parables: The Nation, the Nations and the Reader in Matthew 21:28-22:14*, ed. R. Bauckham, SNTSMS (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
- Osborne, G.R., *Matthew*, ed. C. E. Arnold, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Books, 2010).
- Overman, J. Andrew, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism: the Social world of the Matthean Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).
- Parsons, M.C., and R.I. Pervo, *Rethinking the Unity of Luke and Acts* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).
- Patterson, Stephen J., *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus* (Sonoma: Polebridge Press, 1993).
- Patterson, Stephen J., James M. Robinson, and H.G. Bethge, *The Fifth Gospel: The Gospel of Thomas Comes of Age* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press, 1998).
- Pauck, W., *Melanchthon and Bucer* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969).
- Pennington, Jonathan T., *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew*, ed. M. M. Mitchell and D. P. Moessner, Vol. 126, Supplements to Novum Testamentum (Leiden: Brill, 2007).
- Perrin, Nicholas, *Thomas and Tatian: the Relationship Between the Gospel of Thomas and the Diatessaron* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2002).
- , 'NHC II,2 and the Oxyrhynchus Fragments (P.Oxy 1, 654, 655): Overlooked evidence for a Syriac Gospel of Thomas,' *Vigiliae Christianae* 58, no. 2 (2004), 138-51.
- Perrin, Norman, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976).
- , 'The Christology of Mark: a Study of Methodology (1971, 1974)', in W. R. Telford (ed.), *The Interpretation of Mark* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 134-57.



- Petersen, William L., 'The Parable of the Lost Sheep in the Gospel of Thomas and the Synoptics,' *Novum Testamentum* 23, no. 2 (1981), 128-47.
- Plisch, Uwe-Karsten, *The Gospel of Thomas: Original Text with Commentary*, trans. G. S. Robinson (Freiburg: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2008).
- Pokorný, Petr, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Thomas: From Interpretations to the Interpreted*, ed. J. H. Charlesworth, Jewish and Christian Texts in Contexts and Related Studies (London: T&T Clark, 2009).
- Puech, H.-Ch., 'Un logion de Jésus sur bandelette funéraire,' *Bulletin de la société Ernest Renan* 3 (1955), 126-29.
- , 'The Gospel of Thomas', in E. Hennecke and W. Schneemelcher (eds.), *New Testament Apocrypha* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), 278-307.
- Quispel, Gilles, 'The Gospel of Thomas and the New Testament,' *Vigiliae Christianae* 11 (1957), 189-207.
- Räsänen, Heikki, *Messianic Secret in Mark's Gospel*, trans. C. M. Tuckett (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994).
- Ravens, D. A. S., 'Zacchaeus: The Final Part of a Lucan Triptych?,' *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 13, no. 41 (1991), 19-32.
- Repschinski, Boris, *The Controversy Stories in the Gospel of Matthew: their Redaction, Form and Relevance for the Relationship Between the Matthean Community and Formative Judaism* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000).
- Ricchuiti, Tim, 'Tracking Thomas: A Text-Critical Look at the Transmission of the Gospel of Thomas', in D. B. Wallace (ed.), *Revisiting the Corruption of the New Testament: Manuscript, Patristic and Apocryphal Evidence* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2011), 189-228.
- Ricoeur, Paul, 'Narrative Time,' *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 1 (1980), 169-90.
- Riley, Gregory J., *Resurrection Reconsidered: Thomas and John in Controversy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).
- Robinson, J. A. T., 'The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen: A Test Case of Synoptic Relationships,' *New Testament Studies* 21, no. 4 (1975), 443-61.
- Robinson, James M., and Christoph Heil, 'The Lilies of the Field: Saying 36 of the Gospel of Thomas and Secondary Accretions in Q 12.22b-31,' *New Testament Studies* 47, no. 1 (2001), 1-25.
- Robinson, James M., and Helmut Koester, *Trajectories Through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971).

- Rowe, C. Kavin, *Early Narrative Christology: The Lord in the Gospel of Luke* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006).
- Saldarini, Anthony J., *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
- , 'Boundaries and Polemics in the Gospel of Matthew,' *Biblical Interpretation* 3, no. 3 (1995), 239-65.
- Sanders, E. P., and Margaret Davies, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1989).
- Schmidt, Ulrich, 'Scribes and Variants: Sociology and Typology', in H. A. G. Houghton and D. C. Parker (eds.), *Textual Variation: Theological and Social Tendencies?* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2008), 1-23.
- Schmithals, Walter, 'Jesus verkündigt das Evangelium: Bultmanns Jesus-Buch', in U. H. J. Körtner (ed.), *Jesus im 21. Jahrhundert: Bultmanns Jesusbuch und die heutige Jesusforschung* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2006), 23-60.
- Schnackenberg, R., *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).
- Schnider, R., 'Das Gleichnis vom verlorenen Schaf und seine Redaktoren: ein intertextueller Vergleich,' *Kairos* 19 (1977), 146-54.
- Schottroff, Luise, *Die Gleichnisse Jesu* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2005).
- Schröter, Jens, 'Jesus and the Canon: The Early Jesus Traditions in the Context of the Origins of the New Testament Canon', in R. A. Horsley, J. A. Draper and J. M. Foley (eds.), *Performing the Gospels: Orality, Memory, and Mark* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 104-22.
- , *From Jesus to the New Testament: Early Christian Theology and the Origin of the New Testament Canon*, trans. W. Coppins, ed. W. Coppins and S. Gathercole, BMSEC (Waco/Tübingen: Baylor University Press/Mohr Siebeck, 2013).
- Schweizer, Eduard, *The Good News According to Mark*, trans. D. H. Madvig (London: SPCK, 1971).
- , *The Good News According to Matthew*, trans. D. E. Green (London: SPCK, 1975).
- Scott, Bernard B., *Hear Then the Parable: A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989).
- Sevrin, Jean Marie, 'Un groupement de trois paraboles contre les richesses dans L'Évangile selon Thomas. Ev Th 63, 64, et 65', in J. Delorme (ed.), *Les Paraboles Évangéliques. Perspective Nouvelles* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1989), 425-36.

- Simonetti, M., ed. *Matthew 14-28*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002).
- Skeat, T. C., 'The Lilies of the Field,' *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 37 (1938), 211-14.
- Smith, D. E., 'Ceremonies in Luke-Acts: The Case of Meals and Table Fellowship', in J. H. Neyrey (ed.), *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 361-87.
- Snodgrass, Klyne, *The Parable of the Wicked Tenants*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament (Tübingen: J C B Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1983).
- , *Stories With Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).
- , 'Stories with Prophetic Intent. The Contextualization of Jesus' Parables', in R. Zimmerman (ed.), *Hermeneutik der Gleichnisse Jesu* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 150-64.
- Stanton, G. N., *A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992).
- Stendahl, Krister, *The School of St. Matthew: And Its Use of the Old Testament* (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1954).
- Stern, David, 'Jesus' Parables from the Perspective of Rabbinic Literature: The Example of the Wicked Husbandmen', in C. Thoma and M. Wyschogrod (eds.), *Studies in Judaism and Christianity* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 42-80.
- Stump, Eleonore, *Walking in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2010).
- Talbert, C.H., *Reading Luke: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2002).
- Tannehill, Robert C., *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, Vol. 1: The Gospel according to Luke (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986).
- , *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: a Literary Interpretation*, Vol. 2 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).
- , *Luke* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996).
- Telford, William R., *The Theology of the Gospel of Mark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
- Theissen, Gerd, and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998).

- Thompson, W.G., *Matthew's Advice to a Divided Community* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1970).
- Tolbert, Mary Ann, *Perspectives on the Parables: An Approach to Multiple Interpretations* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979).
- , *Sowing the Word: Mark's World in Literary Historical Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996).
- Trocmé, E., 'Is there a Markan Christology', in B. Lindars and S. S. Smalley (eds.), *Christ and the Spirit in the New Testament. In Honour of Charles Francis Digby Moule* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 3-13.
- Turner, H.E.W., and Hugh Montefiore, *Thomas and the Evangelists* (London: SCM Press, 1962).
- Uro, Risto, *Thomas: Seeking the Historical Context of the Gospel of Thomas* (London: T&T Clark, 2003).
- Valantasis, Richard, *The Gospel of Thomas* (London: Routledge, 1997).
- van Eck, E., and A. G. van Aarde, 'A Narratological Analysis of Mark 12:1-12: The Plot of the Gospel of Mark in a Nutshell,' *HTS Teologiese Studies* 45, no. 4 (1989), 778-800.
- Wallace, David Foster, *Oblivion* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2004).
- Wasserman, Tommy, 'The "Son of God" was in the Beginning,' *Journal of Theological Studies* 62, no. 1 (2011), 20-50.
- Watson, Francis, 'Literary Approaches to the Gospels: A Theological Assessment,' *Theology*, no. 99 (1996), 125-33.
- , *Text and Truth: Redefining Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).
- , 'The Fourfold Gospel', in S. C. Barton (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Gospels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 34-52.
- , *Gospel Writing: A Canonical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013).
- Weaver, D.J., *Matthew's Missionary Discourse: A Literary Critical Analysis* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990).
- Weeden, Theodore J., 'The Heresy that Necessitated Mark's Gospel [1968]', in W. R. Telford (ed.), *The Interpretation of Mark* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1985), 63-88.
- Wellhausen, Julius, *Einleitung in die drei ersten Evangelien* (Berlin: Druck und Verlag von Georg Reimer, 1905).
- Westermann, Claus, *The Parables of Jesus: In the Light of the Old Testament*, trans. F. W. Golka and A. H. B. Logan (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990).

- Williams, James G., *Gospel Against Parable: Mark's Language of Mystery*, ed. D. M. Gunn, Vol. 12, BLS (Decatur: Almond, 1985).
- Williams, R., *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000).
- Willitts, Joel, *Matthew's Messianic Shepherd-King: In Search of 'The Lost Sheep of the House of Israel'* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007).
- Wilson, R. McL., *Studies in the Gospel of Thomas* (Oxford: A.R. Mowbray & Co. Limited, 1960).
- , 'Thomas and the Synoptic Gospels,' *Expository Times* 72 (1960), 36-39.
- , '"Thomas" and the Growth of the Gospels,' *Harvard Theological Review* 53, no. 4 (1960), 231-50.
- Wrede, William, *The Messianic Secret*, trans. J. C. G. Greig (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1971).
- Wright, N.T., *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996).
- Young, Brad, *The Parables: Jewish Tradition and Christian Interpretation* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1998).
- Young, Frances M., *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
- Zimmerman, Ruben, 'How to Understand the Parables of Jesus. A Paradigm Shift in Parable Exegesis,' *Acta Theologica* 29, no. 1 (2009), 157-82.